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The Texan Spy; OR, THE PRAIRIE GUIDE.

BY NEWTON M. CURTIS.

CHAPTER I.

THE ENCAMPMENT—THE PRAIRIE GUIDE—THE DEPARTURE.

It was a mild morning in April, 1846. Not a cloud obscured the bright rays of the sun, and they danced and flashed upon the green leaves, the sweet flowers, and the glittering waters. The groves were vocal with the songs of the birds that fluttered from branch to branch, displaying their rich plumage, and singing their sweetest notes. The air was balmy, and filled with a delicious fragrance that arose from the aromatic plants that grow in such prodigal luxuriance in the rich valley of the Rio Grande.

On the banks of the "Great River," whose waters were brawling over a rocky bed, was clustered the encampment of the "Army of Occupation." Rude breastworks, erected for temporary use, stretched along the margin of the stream, and upon the top and sides of a gentle acclivity near at hand, the white tents of the soldiery glittered in the sun. Grim-looking cannons peered through the openings of the fortifications, armed sentinels were walking to and fro, the stripes and stars waved in the breeze, and frequently the shrill tones of the trumpet, the rich strains of the bugle, or the dull roll of the drum, recalled to the senses the fact, that death was looking at the beautiful picture, and preparing for a banquet upon its elements.

A short distance from the encampment, up the stream, stood Fort Brown. Its walls were rudely constructed, and presented but a rough and haphazard appearance, yet its frowning batteries, its bristling bayonets, and the files of hardy men within the inclosure, denoted that neither beauty of mechanism, or picturesque-ness of appearance, was the object sought for in its

construction. Proudly, from the stalwart flag-staff, floated the "Flag of the Free."

On the opposite side of the river could be seen the low dwellings, the towering domes, and the squalid huts of Matamoras. There, too, were frowning cannons, and armed men. Squads of lancers, dressed in gorgeous uniforms, galloped upon the banks of the river in front of the town, and groups of artillerymen were lounging beside their batteries upon the soft, green grass. Long columns of somber infantry were displayed in front of their barracks, and occasionally, a splendid staff, the escort of some titled officer, displayed its fiery steeds and flashing uniforms before the humble dwellers of the town. Above the city, in long, silken folds, floated the flag of Mexico.

Only the waters of the shallow river, separated the men that were soon to be engaged in the deadly strife.

Just behind Fort Brown, a few rods up the

side of the acclivity we have before mentioned, stood a tent, larger than those around it, and with its center pole elevated several feet upon the canvas roof. From the top of this pole floated a flag—the flag of the United States. Except its size, and the distinction just mentioned, there was nothing in, or about, this tent, to attract the eye of an observer. Its furniture was plain and common, while it was entirely destitute of ornament.

It was the tent of the Commander-in-Chief, who, on the morning in question, was sitting at a rough deal-table, within its folds, intently poring over a parchment that he held in his hands.

Upon a camp-chest, immediately behind the general, two men were sitting, as if awaiting the movements of their superior. One of these men was a tall, commanding personage, clothed in a suit of thin cotton cloth, entirely destitute of military trappings, and the other was a

smaller man, yet with a bold and determined countenance, and he was dressed in the uniform of a captain of dragoons. The former might have been fifty years of age, the latter was scarcely thirty. Like the general, their countenances were expressive of great interest in some important matter, but they maintained a strict silence, scarcely moving a limb.

A half hour elapsed before the general aroused from his reflections. Then, however, he threw his parchment upon the table before him, stretched his limbs as if fatigued by his position, and turning round in his chair in such a manner as to face his friends, he observed, as if speaking to them both:

"The fact is, gentlemen, that the information of which I have spoken, is of the utmost importance. The more I study upon the matter, the more I am strengthened in the belief that we cannot get along without the information."

The person who answered to this question was the tallest and eldest of the two men who sat upon the camp-chest.

"I am of your opinion decidedly. We must have the information, and should obtain it at once."

The general bowed, and continued:

"Do you agree with us, Captain Field?"



THE TEXAN SPY.

The captain of dragoons answered:

"I certainly deem the information important, and am certain we can obtain it."

"That is the next matter to be considered," replied the general. "Let me hear your plan, captain."

"We must send one of our men in quest of it. With proper caution, the journey can be accomplished with safety."

"What do you think of that, colonel?"

"I had another arrangement in view," replied the colonel. "I do not think an American could perform the journey. The country is swarming with hostile bands of the enemy, the road is intricate, and the language of the inhabitants is different from ours. I should propose employing a Mexican upon the service. They think so little of their own government, that they are easily induced to take employment against it, and one, I am sure, might be found to undertake this mission, for a proper reward."

"I should suppose so," replied the general, "yet we ought to know to whom we are trusting."

"Just so," interposed the dragoon. "For this very reason, I propose one of our own men. An individual who will sell his country for gold will not hesitate to betray his employer. These Mexicans are the most treacherous people in existence, and we, above all others, ought not to trust them. If we do, we run a double risk of ruin. As we are situated, we cannot be too cautious."

"Your objection to employing a Mexican is well grounded," replied the general. "I do not at all relish the idea of employing a traitor, but who of our men can we send? It wants a man of intelligence, fortitude, and unquestionable courage."

"I know precisely such a man as you describe. He is also young, hardy, and would delight in an enterprise of danger above all other things, for he has been a long time unemployed, and he is weary of a monotonous life."

"Do I know him?" asked the general.

"Probably not. He is not often in the camp."

"Name him, and if he is qualified for the enterprise, and will undertake it, he shall be richly rewarded."

"Oh! the reward would be no inducement to him. The fact of serving his country is all the incentive he requires. I allude to young Fanchette, or, as he is more commonly called by his friends and acquaintances, the Prairie Guide."

"Just the man!" exclaimed the colonel. "I will add my testimony to the captain's recommendation."

"The Prairie Guide," said the general, musing; "then he must belong to the pioneers."

"He is now at the encampment at the ford, some six miles above us," replied the captain.

"If you remember, he led them to their position. Possibly you may recollect him."

"No matter," replied the general; "your recommendation and the colonel's indorsement are sufficient for me. It seems as if I had some faint recollection of a young man who conducted one of our regiments from Point Isabel."

"He is the person," replied the captain.

"A brave fellow, upon my word. Do you say that he is now at the ford above us?"

"He is."

"To-morrow I will see him, then; nay, stop. I wish to visit that post, and will go this afternoon. I should be pleased to have you accompany me, gentlemen."

"Of course," replied the captain; "and we shall also need a little escort. Several parties of the Mexicans have crossed over to our side of the river, within a few days."

"We may as well be prepared to meet them," replied the general, "though I hardly think they would dare to molest us. We resolve, of course, to employ the Guide?"

Both the colonel and the captain answered this question in the affirmative, and the conference ended. The gentlemen retired to their quarters, and the general, calling a servant, gave orders about his dinner, and then strolled through the camp.

In the afternoon the general and his two friends, accompanied by a party of dragoons, set out for the little encampment at the ford. The path lay over the level bottom of the valley, and was perfectly free from chaparral or other obstacle, and the distance was soon accomplished.

The post at this point numbered but about a hundred individuals, and was more for the sake of communicating the alarm, in case the enemy attempted to cross the river, than for any effective opposition they would be able to make. Like their comrades opposite Matamoras, they were encamped upon the banks of the stream, with their white tents sheltered as much as possible by the branches of a few stunted and gnarled oaks that grew upon the spot.

The little cavalcade, at the head of which the general and the captain of dragoons were riding, halted in the center of the little encampment. The Commander-in-Chief was conducted to the tent of the officer of the post, and his disappearance was the signal for the men of both parties to mingle and relieve the monotony of their lives, by the interchange of news and gossip, and by speculating upon the prospects of the war in future. They were soon at their ease, while the officers clustered around the tent that contained their chieftain.

Captain Field introduced the object of the visit. Turning to the commander of the little post, he asked:

"Is the 'Prairie Guide' in the camp?"

"He is."

"Let him be called: the general wishes for a few minutes' conversation with him."

The Guide was sent for. The tent in which he slept, for he lived otherwise in the open air, was near at hand, and he was fortunately at his place. In a few minutes, therefore, he entered the tent containing the officers.

Seldom had it fallen to the lot of the general, to gaze upon a more perfect specimen of external man, than the one that stood before him. Although he had spent many long years with an army, constantly changing its members at different intervals, yet he had never before seen a countenance and figure, so expressive of the finished and accomplished man!

Robert Fanchette was all that his promising external would lead a person to expect.

He was nearly six feet high, and while his proportions were muscular, and denoted great strength, there was nothing of grossness in his form. Indeed a casual observer would call it slight in proportion to its height. The arms were long, and most elegantly rounded, and they moved with an ease and grace, peculiarly their own. They seemed adapted to graceful motions, and the vigorous and effective use of the weapons of war.

The countenance of the Guide was handsome. The full, open forehead, shaded by locks of rich auburn hair; the black eyes that flashed like a diamond; the haughty red lips, slightly apart, and disclosing a row of excellent teeth, and the prominent chin, finely cut, presenting a countenance that possessed many charms in the estimation of the opposite sex, and was far from being regarded as disagreeable by his own companions.

As soon as he entered the tent, he was introduced to the notice of the general. Then they retired together, and after the tenor of the mission had been told him, the frank old officer, without concealing the danger of the enterprise, asked him if he would undertake to execute the commission.

"With all my heart!" exclaimed the young man. "I know it is a dangerous mission, but to use the language of another—

"That danger's self is lure alone."

"Can you converse in Spanish?"

"As well as in my own tongue."

"That will be greatly in your favor. I feel that your natural shrewdness does not need a caution, yet I cannot forbear asking you to remember, that the ultimate success of our little army depends, in a great measure, upon the fruits of your mission. You must enter the city—make yourself master of the different passes that lead to it. Then obtain a plan of its fortifications, and ascertain the point that can be most effectively assailed."

"I understand the duty, sir. How long a time can I be absent? When do you wish to move toward it?"

"That depends upon circumstances. Actual hostilities have not yet commenced, though Ampudia considers us as invaders of the Mexican territory, and has given notice that we must fall back to the Nueces in twenty-four hours, or suffer the consequences. We cannot hope to avoid a collision but a few days. On the commencement of hostilities, I shall at once advance upon Monterey."

"Then it behooves me to be as expeditious

as possible. The journey and the errand might be accomplished in three weeks, making allowance for all inconveniences."

"That time will answer. We have reinforcements to receive—provisions to procure—and many other arrangements to make, before we can enter upon an active campaign."

"Then I will start to-morrow."

"Well. Come to the camp opposite Matamoras to-morrow, and you shall be sent. In the meantime, do not give your comrades the slightest clew to your mission."

"No caution is necessary in regard to that point," replied the Guide, as an expression of scorn lingered for a moment upon his features. "I have seen enough of service to learn my duty, and my memory yet retains it!"

"I will answer for your discretion with my own head," answered the general. "To-morrow I shall expect you."

"I will not disappoint you."

The Guide returned to his tent, and the general rejoined his comrades. The cavalcade soon after departed for Fort Brown. He had equipped himself for the journey, in the few hours that had elapsed since he had been solicited to undertake the mission, and with all his resources about his person, he sought the tent of the general.

He was joyfully received. Colonel Thorpe, and Captain Field, were present in the general's tent; having been engaged throughout the morning in writing down the young man's instructions, and in selecting from the camp-chest such implements as he would want to perfect his drafts and plans.

Within an hour the guide was ready for departure. A blue woolen frock, that reached to the knee was thrown over his dress, and in a girdle, beneath its folds, were concealed a brace of revolvers, a long knife, and a few articles of provisions. A short rifle was strapped to his shoulders, in such a manner that it could be prepared for service in a moment, and in his hand he carried a long staff, which would seem to indicate that his purposes were more peaceful than warlike. His head was covered with a close woolen cap, such as was usually worn by the dwellers in the land he was about to visit, and all military or other ornaments were carefully removed from his person.

"Now, my boy!" said the dragoon captain, who followed him to the door of the tent: "remember, that such an opportunity to distinguish yourself, has never occurred before. Taylor is not the man to neglect you, if you do your duty."

"Nor am I the man to neglect my duty," proudly replied the Guide. "The path is dangerous, and I may never return. If I should not, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Name it," exclaimed Field.

"It is that you will inform my friends of my fate. You know where they reside. Several years have passed since they have received tidings of me. It might be a source of pleasure to them, to know that I was performing my duty."

"I will attend to your request, if it needs be; but you will return to us, I am sure."

The Guide made no reply, but waved a farewell with his hand, and started down the river.

"There is something about that fellow that I cannot fathom," muttered Field, as he re-entered the tent. "He is a noble one at all events; and if he does not make a noise in the world yet, then I'm no prophet. One may look a long time for his equal."

CHAPTER II.

SAN JUAN—THE RANCHO—DONNA ISABELLA—CAPTAIN MINON—THE PROPOSAL—THE REFUSAL.

BETWEEN Camargo and Monterey, on the banks of the river of the same name, stands the little village of San Juan. Unlike most Mexican villages, it is quite elegantly situated, tastefully built, and its little streets present a cleanly and quiet appearance. It is interspersed with groves of beautiful trees, that present a most delightful shelter from the scorching rays of the sun, and afford some of the most lovely walks in a moonlight night, that is easy to conceive of.

The inhabitants of this charming place, are, in the main, a peaceful and contented class, subsisting entirely by agriculture, for the pursuit of which, the rich and luxuriant banks of the river, and the wide valley through which it runs, offers every inducement. Their flocks and herds are numerous; nor are smiling grain

fields, and teeming gardens, of unfrequent occurrence.

Some half a mile from the village, on the opposite shore of the river, in the midst of the beautiful valley, stands the Rancho of the proprietor of San Juan, and the fertile lands for many miles around it. His name is Don Ferdinand Xera, and his chief pride consists in surveying his broad estates, and in knowing that he is descended from the purest Spanish blood in the country.

The Rancho is almost a village of itself. The mansion in which Don Ferdinand and his family reside, is a large, three story, brick building, painted a most delicate white, and surrounded with lattices and verandas, that are nearly covered with bright green vines, which emit a most delicious odor. Around the main building, are clustered innumerable smaller ones, which are the residence of a great body of servants and laborers, in the employ of the wealthy proprietor. After these, are the out-buildings, consisting of barns and store-houses, in which the produce of the immense estate is deposited.

All these buildings are neatly painted, and the whole is surrounded by a high wall, which can be passed by means of four gates, which open to the four points of the compass.

Don Ferdinand Xera was a bachelor, of some sixty years of age; yet he was hale and hearty, and, as yet, showed no symptoms of decay. From a natural dislike of the fair sex, or, because his tastes were very difficult, and he could never suit himself, he had never been married, yet he was the most gallant man in all his region of country. The affairs of his household were conducted by his niece, Donna Isabella Xera, who, since the death of her parents, had resided with her uncle, her only remaining relation.

Donna Isabella was a most lovely maid. Every trait of that proud beauty, for which Spain is so justly celebrated, seemed to have centered in her person. She was a trifle above the ordinary height, with all that tempting fullness of form so often met with in the sunny climes of the South. Her large black eye, that usually appeared so obscure-like and languishing, but that flashed and sparkled so vividly, when aroused by passion or excitement, was, of itself, enough to have secured her a host of admirers, but it was not her only beautiful feature. Her brow was smooth, high and full; and the delicate silken hair, that shaded it, was as black and glossy as polished jet. Her nose, mouth, and chin, were Grecian, and were most exquisitely cut.

Donna Isabella was the only child of her deceased parents; and, as they were wealthy and passionately fond of her, it may well be supposed that every labor and expense had been lavished upon her education. She played, sang, danced, painted, with the most lady-like skill; nor were these accomplishments the most valuable parts of her acquirements. The more solid and useful branches had not been neglected; and in the dry, and repulsive sciences, she was no mean proficient.

For two years this lovely girl had been an inmate of her uncle's mansion. In fact, she was its mistress, and controlled that portion of the domestic affairs usually assigned to women, without any interference from Don Ferdinand. Indeed, he had no occasion to interfere, for he was compelled to confess, that since he had been the proprietor of the Rancho, his domestic affairs had never been in such perfect order.

Donna Isabella was very wealthy. Her father had left an immense estate, and her uncle, Don Ferdinand, had disposed of it to excellent advantage, and held the money in trust for his niece, at any time when she should demand it. She was now some nineteen years of age, and the old man was often gloomy when thinking she would soon marry, and then his old house would be robbed of its brightest ornament.

His tears were very reasonable, for it is not to be supposed that a young lady of her beauty and wealth would be long without suitors, nor was it reasonable to think that one, in whose veins flowed the hot blood of Spain, would refuse a proper offer of marriage, provided her heart felt the influence of the tender passion.

Several youths had already aspired to her hand; yet, while she did not flatly refuse them, and permitted their visits, they were obliged to acknowledge that they saw but few promises of success. One, however, seemed determined to carry off the prize, and he cer-

tainly had the most flattering prospects, for it was well known that the old uncle favored his suit.

This sanguine person was Captain Minon, the commander of a company of lancers who were quartered at San Juan. He was a dark, repulsive-looking individual, forty years of age, rough and unpolished in his manners, and possessing a heart utterly destitute of refinement and good feeling. He boasted of high blood, however, and was also the possessor of vast wealth. Upon these two qualifications, backed up by the influence of the uncle, which he had managed to obtain, he relied for success, and was so confident, that he had even publicly mentioned his intention of marrying the beautiful heiress.

Quartered in sight of the Rancho, having admission within its walls at all hours; and not overburdened with duty, he spent much of his time in the presence of the fair Isabella. She absolutely detested him, dreaded the sight of his odious face, and wished that he might be called to the frontier, yet she was compelled to receive him with politeness, and treat him kindly for fear of offending her uncle, who was uniformly so kind that she could not think of giving him pain. Captain Minon construed her forbearance into a partiality for his person!

Isabella had been brought up on the banks of the Rio Grande, and so had Captain Minon, whose estates lay there. This little circumstance he endeavored to torture into capital for his suit, and he was always sure to allude to it, when he desired to be more than usually tender and impressive. Isabella was forced to admit his claim to a common birth-place with herself, yet she felt that the fact was anything but flattering to her.

Matters stood thus when news reached San Juan, that the northern barbarians had actually encamped opposite Matamoras, and that hostilities were daily expected. The commanders of troops at the different posts were warned to hold themselves in readiness at a moment's notice, to march to the assistance of General Ampudia, and the vindication of Mexican honor.

This was unpleasant news to Captain Minon. Aside from the society of Donna Isabella, which he felt to be very dear to him, he was situated in a pleasant village, where the subsistence was excellent and the duty light. He was not a brave man, and he did not at all relish the probability of exposing his body to the muskets of the enemies of his country. He told great stories of his prowess, however, and often wished that himself and his gallant command might be called where the strife raged the most furious.

The captain resolved to act a prudent part in his love matters at all events. He determined to secure Isabella, and then, if he was called from her presence no rival could step in and secure her. To this end he resolved to visit the Rancho at once and declare to her his preference and make arrangements for his immediate marriage. This was proceeding like a skillful commander, and he flattered himself that he was one, if the service of Mexico could boast of such.

One bright and glorious evening, he galloped down to the Rancho. After securing his charger he sought the presence of his mistress, and found her sitting on the balcony with her uncle, enjoying the balmy and delicious air of the early spring. This was somewhat of a disappointment to him, for he had hoped to find her alone, yet he resolved to maintain his ground and trust to circumstances.

The old uncle appeared rejoiced to see him, and invited him to a seat. The captain complied with his request, and in a few moments they were engaged in earnest conversation respecting the war.

Don Ferdinand rattled on at a tremendous rate, and the captain saw plainly that he must get clear of the house, if he succeeded in gaining the ear of Donna Isabella. He therefore took advantage of a pause in the old man's conversation and requested the lovely girl to join him in a walk.

The conversation was carried on in Spanish, but we shall take the liberty of translating it for our readers.

Isabella would have refused this request, for she felt that the presence of the captain would destroy all the pleasure the walk might afford her but the old uncle interfered:

"I really wish, dear niece," said he, "that you would walk with the captain. You are

shut up in the house continually, and I am satisfied that the confinement is injurious to you. By all means take a walk with the captain!"

Thus appealed to, Isabella could not refuse. She threw a light shawl over her head and shoulders, and taking the arm that her gallant proffered her, they descended to the court, and passed out beyond the walls. The captain was delighted.

"Which way shall we walk?" he asked. "Shall we go toward the village, or below the Rancho?"

"Oh! we will go toward the village by all means. It is so lonely and gloomy down the stream."

"Well, toward the village then. We will walk slowly, if you please, for I have much to say to you!"

"To me?" said the beautiful girl, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, to you," said the captain, but he forthwith became as silent as the grave.

The heart of the young maiden beat painfully, for she expected a declaration. She felt that she must refuse him, but she feared that her refusal would offend her uncle.

They walked very slowly toward the village, the captain maintaining a determined silence. At length they reached a beautiful grove, in the shades of which the servants had erected temporary seats. These caught the captain's eye, and he said:—

"Let us enter this grove, lady, and be seated. It is a most delightful spot, for the tale I have to tell."

Isabella did not dare to refuse him, and they were soon seated in the little grove.

"I presume," said the captain, "that your uncle has told you the news from the Rio Grande."

"He has not," replied Isabella, her heart catching at the hope that her comrade did not intend to converse about love matters after all. "He has told me no news."

"The Americans have reached the river, and encamped opposite to Matamoras."

"Indeed!" replied the girl, and a shade of melancholy darkened her features as she thought of the horrors of war.

"Yes, and I expect soon to be called upon to defend our land. THEN I must leave you."

"Surely, you should rejoice at the opportunity of doing your duty to your country."

"Of course, but it grieves me to think of leaving you. We have spent so many pleasant hours together!"

The shadows of the trees concealed the flashing eye and quivering lip of the maiden.

"How little should such enjoyments weigh, when compared with a chance of signaling yourself upon the battle-field. As brave a man as Captain Minon, should rejoice at this opportunity of gaining imperishable laurels!"

"And so I do, Isabella. Still I may say that it is painful to leave your society."

"You jest, captain!"

"Jest!" said the dark man at her side, his fiery blood aroused by her voice and her presence. "I never jest. I love you to madness. I love you beyond telling."

Isabella would have given her patrimony, to have been in her own room in the Rancho.

"Yes," continued the captain, "I do love you as I say, and I am happy to inform you, that your uncle has consented to our union. I am anxious that you should set the time. Only let it be as soon as possible, and I shall be contented. After that I can go to the wars with a bold heart!"

Isabella was silent. Indeed, she knew not what to say, for the gallant captain appeared to have arranged the matter beforehand. All that he required of her was to set the day when a priest should be called in to complete the ceremony.

The captain endeavored to look very tender and affectionate, but it was an expression his countenance was incapable of. The most he could do was to make a grimace, and it was a most ludicrous one. Donna Isabella did not see it in the dark, else she could not have restrained from laughter.

"You did not answer me, Isabella!" said the captain, after a long pause. "When shall the ceremony take place?"

"What ceremony?" she asked, faintly.

"Pshaw! How dull you are, or else you are determined to tease me! Women generally take that liberty with their lovers. I mean, when shall we be married?"

Isabella saw that she might as well meet this

unpleasant matter at once, and have it finally disposed of. She therefore turned toward the captain, and said:

"Never!"

"Oh! curse this badinage!" replied he. "If you knew how it annoyed me at this time, I am sure you would set the time for our union, and let it be as speedily as possible."

"You are very importunate!" replied Donna Isabella, who felt her anger excited at this dogged perseverance.

"Importunate!" exclaimed the captain, "to be sure I am. I may be called away from you to-morrow, perhaps never return. Can you wonder that I am importunate?"

"Did you understand me?"

"How? What?"

"I repeat to you, that we will NEVER WED."

"Surely you jest!"

"I repeat it, sir, and I was never more serious in my life. You and I will never wed."

"Why not, for God's sake?" asked the captain, greatly surprised at this refusal.

"I do not love you?"

"So YOU LOVE ANOTHER!" cried the captain; and his cheek grew crimson and his eye flashed.

"I said not that I loved another. I merely said that I did not love you. I will not wed one I do not love."

The captain was enraged. All the jealousy of his Spanish heart was aroused, and he mentally swore he would murder the successful lover, let him be who he would. He turned to his companion, who sat calmly beside him, and said:

"Surely, Isabella, you will alter this hasty conclusion. I love you most fervently. My property is ample, and you shall have every indulgence that your heart can ask. Besides all this, your uncle is in favor of the match, and will give us his blessing."

"It is not only useless but unpleasant to multiply words on this subject," replied the maiden. "I repeat that I do not love you, cannot love you, and therefore will not wed you. As a friend, I shall always be proud to acknowledge you, but our intimacy can extend no further; I do not wish to give you pain, but your persistence drives me to it. My refusal need not be the cause of one moment's sorrow to you, for there are a thousand titled dames in the land who would be happy to wed the gallant Captain Minon."

The soul of the Spaniard was shaken with passion. For so long a time had he regarded Donna Isabella as his own, that this refusal came upon him with a most frightful effect. He had not once dreamed of her refusal. He had not thought it possible that she could refuse a captain of lancers, a rich man, and a descendant of the aristocracy of Iturbide's days. His dark passions were lashed into a most fearful storm, and he almost determined to thrust his dagger to the heart of the girl, who sat beside him, appearing more lovely than ever, since she had declared the hopelessness of his suit.

Isabella saw the passion that agitated him, but she was not afraid. The tall chimneys of the Rancho, and the glittering spires of San Juan were in sight, and she well knew that succor could be procured from either place. She also thought that a little time would calm his agitation, and then reflection would teach him that he ought not to be offended at her decision.

She awaited the subsiding of his passion. Had she even have judged him by her own heart, she would have seen that it was a lengthy task, but she made no comparison of the kind. At length her comrade turned toward her. She was surprised at the terrible marks his passion had left upon his countenance.

"Then I am to regard your decision as absolutely final? You can hold out no hope to me for the future?"

"None whatever."

"Have I ever offended you?"

"Not in the least."

"Why do you dislike me then? Am I not as good as other men? I cannot bring myself to think that lack of beauty alone would lead you to refuse the offer of a trusting heart."

"You but do me justice," replied Isabella. "Your beauty, or the lack of it, has never entered my mind. Neither did I say that I DISLIKED you. I simply said, I did not love you. This is the truth; but I cannot tell you why it is so."

"Why can't you tell me? I am sure I am

interested in the matter deeply enough to know."

"I cannot tell you, because I do not know myself."

"Then we part to night forever, do we?"

"As lovers we do. If we do as friends and acquaintances, the fault will rest with you."

"Let us return to the Rancho."

The captain proffered his arm to the fair girl, and she accepted it but he strode toward the house in gloomy silence. At the door, he bade her adieu, and was just mounting his horse to return to the village, when the voice of Don Ferdinand greeted him:—

"One moment, captain? Come to my office, for I wish to see you on important business."

The captain obeyed the summons, and entered a little room, designated as the office of the old uncle. He found the old gentleman seated at a table, covered with books and accounts. The old man motioned him to a seat, and as a smile of a peculiar meaning lit up his wrinkled features, he said:—

"Well, I hope you have disposed of the affair at last. Being somewhat interested, I hope I have the right to inquire."

"I do not understand you!" said the captain, somewhat gruffly.

"Humph! how dumb you are! Let me speak a little more plainly to you. Did you propose to yon little girl to-night? I thought when you went out, that taking the moonlight, the breeze, and all things together, it would be a most capital time."

The captain wished the old man, his "little girl," the moonlight and the breeze, all to the devil! Nevertheless, the question was plain enough now, and he MUST answer it. Don Ferdinand Xera was not the man to be trifled with.

"I did propose," he said.

"Did you appoint the time?" asked the old man, rubbing his hands briskly.

"She refused me, sir!" answered the captain, crustily.

"REFUSED YOU!" repeated the old man, as his countenance elongated and his hands fell upon his lap.

"Yes, refused me!"

"The devil!"

"It's true, sir!"

"Does she love another?"

"Really, she must tell you that herself. For my part, I do not know. With your permission I will take my leave."

"Certainly. But, captain—don't be hasty. You know I have something to say in these affairs, now that her father is dead."

The captain bowed and departed. To judge from the furious clatter of his horse's feet, the consolation of the old man had not reached his heart.

"Holy Virgin!" cried the Don, when the captain had departed. "What can possess the girl to act in this manner? Why, the captain is the best match for her the town affords. He is rich, and is descended from one of our good old families. I must talk to the girl, and she will alter her decision. After all, I presume she only wanted to try her power! It's natural for the whole sex."

Don Ferdinand retired to his bed, resolved that he would postpone his intended conversation with his niece to the following morning. He doubted not but that he would convince her of the impropriety of her conduct.

The old man had yet to learn a few lessons, especially concerning the passions and impulses of the female sex.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHAPARRAL—THE ROBBERS' RANCHO—THE ESCAPE.

THE Prairie Guide descended the river from Fort Brown but a few miles before he crossed over to the opposite side. He landed in a dense and almost impassable chaparral, and justly considered that the perils of his distant journey had just begun.

As the reader has already divined, his destination was Monterey. After crossing the Rio Grande, and gaining the chaparral, his road lay directly up the stream, thus retracing the distance he had already traversed, only his path was in another place. This course would lead him in the rear of the town of Matamoras, then filled, as well as its suburbs, with Mexican troops of the most fierce and bloodthirsty description. His detection was certain death, for the ruthless villains showed no quarter, when the odds were sufficiently in

their favor to allay their fears. The object in making this circuit was to gain the valley of San Juan by an unfrequented route, and also to avoid the dangers of passing through Rianosa and Comargo, and the armed country that lay around them. It also saved many weary miles of forest travel.

After entering the chaparral, which stretched, dense and dark, for many miles around him, the Guide was compelled to observe the greatest caution. He knew that these thickets were usually filled with robbers and outlaws, who made victims of all that chance placed in their power, whether friends or foes. He therefore proceeded slowly, and some time after noon, when he seated himself beside a muddy spring to partake of some food, he found that he was but two or three miles in the rear of Matamoras.

This slow progress and the labor with which it was attended, did not discourage the lion-hearted youth. He partook of his food as coolly as if he had been in the camp of his friends, and then tightening the broad leather girdle under the folds of his frock, he seized his staff and resumed his way, with an elastic and unwearied step.

Without interruption he pursued his way until night overtook him. He had not yet emerged from the chaparral, yet he had caught occasional glimpses of the distant range of mountains—and these he knew must lay in the vicinity of the waters of San Juan. He looked about him for a place of rest, and selected a thicket of more than ordinary density as his abode for the night.

Determined at the outset to be burdened with as little weight as possible, he found himself destitute of a blanket to shield him from the dews of the night. He fortified himself with a generous supply of provisions, and, submitting to the inconveniences under which he labored with as good a grace as he could command, he crowded into his lonely bed to await the coming of another sun.

Sleep soon overpowered his senses, and he slumbered till the morning dawned, as sweetly as if his limbs were reposing on beds of the softest down.

For two days he pursued his course toward the mountains. After his first day's travel, he advanced with greater freedom, and consequently more speed, for he had passed beyond Matamoras, and was traversing a country but thinly settled and beyond the reach of the scouting parties of the army assembled on the Rio Grande. On the evening of the third day he arrived at the foot of the chain of high hills that guarded the southern shore of the San Juan.

Weary enough, yet determined to persevere to the end of his journey, the youth halted at the base of the hill and prepared his humble bed for the night. His provisions were running short, and he ate but a scanty supper, yet he was buoyed up by the hope that the middle of another day would bring him to a Rancho, where his disguise and the knowledge of Spanish he possessed, would render it safe for him to stop and obtain a new supply.

With the earliest dawn he commenced the ascent of the hill. There was no path to guide his steps and he clambered over the jagged rocks and fallen trees with almost incredible labor, yet a few hours found him at the top, enjoying the delicious and unrivaled view that his elevated situation afforded him.

Below him, teeming with waving fields and enlivened with flocks and herds, was the valley of San Juan. The bright waters of the river rolled like melted silver through the middle of the "softened vale," fertilizing the green fields through which it passed, and adding an indescribable charm to the appearance of the lovely landscape. At the foot of the hill, just within the edge of the plain, was a solitary Rancho, consisting of some five or six rude dwellings, and as many out-buildings, and toward it the young man turned his steps, after he had feasted his eyes upon the view of the valley. The descent was made with ease, and a short time found him knocking at the gates, which were tightly barred and closed, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour.

No answer was made to his summons for some time, and he redoubled his noise at the gates. At length he heard a rattling of the wooden bars within, and at last the gates opened, and a rough, unshaven, and repulsive-looking face was thrust out.

"Whose's here?" he asked in Spanish; "and what means this din and clatter?"

"A stranger and a traveler," replied the Guide, "wishes to procure food."

"You must wait till I see the master," replied the Mexican, and again the gate was barred, and the youth was left standing on the outside.

Near half an hour elapsed before the gate was again opened. The young man had lost all patience, and was about resuming his journey, although his stomach loudly demanded food. The rough face was again thrust out, and said:

"Come in."

The Guide obeyed the invitation, and entered the inclosure. He was forcibly struck with the filthy and wretched appearance of everything about him, and could scarcely repress the feelings of disgust that he experienced. The court was dirty and unpaved; offals of slaughtered animals, half consumed by the swine, were scattered about, emitting a most horrid stench, and broken and decayed furniture, and injured weapons of different kinds were mingled in heaps, with torn harness and broken implements of husbandry. After his Mexican master of ceremonies had again secured the gate, he stepped in before him and said:

"Follow me! I will conduct you to my master."

They entered a rickety and dilapidated tenement, and commenced ascending a dark and narrow stairway. Fanchette retained his hold of that garment of his conductor which answered the purpose of a coat, else he would never have kept his way, for the stairway rambled in every direction. At last the Mexican threw open a heavy door, and retreating a few paces, motioned the stranger to enter.

The room before the Guide was as filthy, almost, as the wretched court through which he had passed. It contained no furniture but a few chairs and an old table, at which an individual was sitting, discussing with great apparent gusto the good qualities of some boiled eggs and some black bread.

The same filchiness and negligence of apparel that characterized his conductor was obvious in the individual who sat at the table. His garments were ragged and soiled, his beard matted and unshaven, and his whole appearance wretched in the extreme. He was apparently about fifty years of age, and the fire of his keen black eye, and the still firm and rounded muscles of his frame, gave token that age rested lightly upon him.

When the Guide entered the room, this individual turned to him and said:

"Sit down!"

The Guide obeyed him, and seated himself in a chair.

"Have you traveled far?" asked the Mexican.

"From the Rio Grande!" answered the Guide.

The Mexican's eye brightened. He dropped his black bread, and turned toward his visitor.

"Are the enemy there?"

"They are."

"Is there a prospect of battle?"

"It is looked for every day."

"Who are the strongest?"

"We are."

The Mexican looked sharply at the Guide, and with something of sternness, replied:—

"We! You are no Mexican!"

Fanchette was not in the least disconcerted. He answered him with the utmost calmness:

"No, I am not a Mexican. I am a Frenchman, in the employment of your Government."

"What employment?" asked the Mexican, whose suspicions seemed to be aroused.

"I am an engineer."

"Why do you leave the Rio Grande, then?"

"I am sent by the commanding officer."

"Of course he gave you a pass then?"

This catechising was getting too particular for the young man. The old curmudgeon before him, seemed to be a man of more than ordinary suspicion and shrewdness. He, therefore, answered him in a tone of impatience, and as if further questions were useless.

"He gave me no pass. Like the pass of every Mexican, mine lays in a strong arm, and a determination to submit to no trifling. If you can furnish me with food, I will reward you for it. If you cannot, I will pursue my way!"

The Mexican left the table, and approaching the door, thrust out his head and cried:

"Gonzalvo! Gonzalvo!"

The slovenly servant appeared.

"Get some breakfast for the young stranger. You may serve it up in this room, if he has no objections."

The Guide felt his appetite growing faint, as he surveyed the person of the cook, but as the Mexican looked toward him, as if expecting him to speak, he said:

"In this room by all means. I wish to converse with my entertainer."

Gonzalvo departed. The Mexican resumed his seat at the dirty table, and commenced munching his bread and eggs.

The Guide did not half like the appearance of his situation. Two more desperate looking ruffians than Gonzalvo and his master, he had never seen. The Rancho more resembled the lair for a wild beast, than the residence of Christians. There was an air of cheerless desolation in the dingy apartment in which he was seated, that threw a gloom over his spirits in spite of himself. Everything about him wore an air of suspicion. There were no females to be seen, no laborers in employment, and although the Rancho was situated in a tranquil part of the country, the gates were closely barred, while the sun was shining brightly. He feared he had fallen into bad hands, but it was now too late to retreat. He must make the best of it.

In the midst of his reflections, Gonzalvo entered the room, bearing his breakfast in a huge wooden tray. He placed it upon the table occupied by his master, and departed. The old Mexican called the Guide.

"You have not told me your name! I am Don Francisco Morales."

"Mine is La Ronge," replied the Guide.

"Well, sit up to the table. Here is the food you require. I ought to apologize to you for the scantiness of the fare, but you will remember that you are an unexpected guest."

"No apologies are necessary," replied the Guide. "A soldier, you know, is content with any fare."

"I must leave you, for a short time," said Don Francisco. "I have some affairs to attend to, below. By the time you have finished your food, I will return."

The Guide bowed, and Don Francisco left the room. He closed the door behind him, and while the young man was wondering at such conduct, he heard the heavy bolt spring in the lock, and he felt that he was a prisoner!

A shade of melancholy darkened the fine features of the youth. He crossed the room to a little window opposite his chair, and looked out. A most enticing prospect of the sweet valley and sparkling waters of San Juan was before him, and he looked upon them with the bitter conviction that the pleasant sight was all he could enjoy of them.

"This is unfortunate!" he said, as he folded his arms upon his breast with a sort of forced calmness. "What can this wolf expect to gain by making me a prisoner? If there are no other inmates of the place than himself and servant, they have an active duty in prospect, if they think to keep me confined."

And the young man felt beneath the folds of his frock for his pistols and knives.

He returned to the table and examined the contents of the tray. After considerable hesitation, he partook of an egg and a few morsels of the black, unsavory bread.

Soon after he had concluded his unsatisfactory repast, his attention was drawn to a succession of noises below stairs. He only caught them indistinctly, and could not tell whether they were occasioned by the trampling of horses, or the rattling of wheels upon the pavement. The little window did not command a view of the yard, and he was, consequently, forced to remain in uncertainty.

Hour after hour passed away, and Don Francisco Morales did not make his appearance. This was enough to convince the guide that he was a prisoner, even if any further proof was necessary. Henceforth, all his energies were to be devoted to making his escape.

He tried the door of his apartment, but its stout panels and heavy hinges were not to be shaken. He examined the conformation of the lock, but its mechanism was so stoutly and effectually concealed, that he could devise no plan to undo or destroy it. If he ever escaped from the place, it must be by encountering his jailer, when he entered the apartment to bring him food. Knowing the folly of useless regrets, he took his position by the little window, to amuse his mind with the sights of the valley. They did not offer any enticing variety, to be sure, but there was something in the

works of nature, however commonplace or tame, that had attractions for the young man. He, therefore, seated himself, and watched the flowing of the waters, the graceful gambols of the flocks, and the alternate struggles of the sunshine and shade for supremacy.

Engaged in this innocent diversion, he did not observe the approach of a solitary horseman, until both steed and rider were plain to be seen. Then, indeed, he felt a thrill of unusual excitement, for the rider was dressed in a gorgeous uniform, bedizened with ornaments of gold, and fluttering with gaudily-colored ribbons. The steed was also fancifully appareled, and his lagging gait and heavy tread told that he had been ridden fast and far. Most intently did the Guide watch the movements of the horseman, for he held his way directly toward the Rancho.

"This is some military commander who has been informed of my detention, and he has come to examine me," thought he. "In that case, my fate is soon sealed! If I am discovered, my life will be forfeited by these half-civilized devils who know no mercy."

When the horseman approached so near that his features could be clearly distinguished, the young man scanned them with an earnest scrutiny.

"If he is my judge I have no mercy to expect," he thought, "and I may as well prepare myself for the worst."

The horseman kept on to the gate of the Rancho, and the Guide lost sight of him. Then he removed his chair from the little window and awaited the hour of his expected examination with mingled fear and dread. How very natural it is for mortals to anticipate the most melancholy results from the most trifling incidents.

The Guide had little cause for fear, for the gay horseman was no other than Captain Minon, and his errand to the Rancho of Don Francisco Morales related to other matters than the examination of suspected prisoners.

He thumped lustily at the gate for admission. His summons was speedily answered, for both Don Francisco and his servant, Gonzalvo, had witnessed his arrival. He rode into the rude and decaying court, when he dismounted, and throwing his reins to Gonzalvo he extended both his hands to Don Francisco, as though he was rejoiced to see him.

"Good-morning, my most excellent friend," he said. "By our blessed lady, you are looking well."

Don Francisco replied gruffly to this salutation, but Captain Minon did not heed his manner.

"My stay with you must be brief, my good friend," he continued, "where are your men?"

"They are absent," replied Don Francisco.

"Coining the gold, eh?" said Minon, with a knowing smile. "Well, well, they are brave fellows and deserve success. But come, lead me to a private room. I would converse with you alone."

Don Francisco entered the house and ascended the stairs, followed by Captain Minon. They entered a room adjoining the one occupied by the Guide, and, in the absence of chairs, seated themselves upon an old chest that stood in a corner.

"Speak low," said Don Francisco; "for the next room is occupied by a stranger."

"A stranger," exclaimed the captain—"who is he?"

"He says he is a Frenchman from the Rio Grande, in the service of the Government."

The countenance of Captain Minon fell. The presence of this stranger threatened to interfere with his plans.

"What does he here?"

"He stopped for food, but I took the liberty of locking him up in the chamber. I did not like his appearance."

"Beware! Don Francisco!" exclaimed the captain. "You know there are many Frenchmen in our employ, and if you should detain an agent of the Government, I would not answer for your head."

"But I do not believe he is an agent of the Government," persisted the old Mexican. "He is an impostor."

"That's nothing to you!" said the captain, sharply. "It is the business of the military commanders to attend to them. What could an impostor accomplish here? It is quite probable that he is a Government agent, and he will represent your conduct to Ampudia. In case he does, you are a ruined man."

The terrors of the old villain were excited.

His object in securing the young man had been plunder and nothing else. He cared not a fig for all the impostors in Mexico. He therefore replied, with some trepidation in his tone and manner:

"You say truly; it is the business of the military to attend to these matters, and I will turn the fellow over to you. I am sure I only intended to do my duty as a good citizen."

"No doubt of that," returned Minon, in a soothing manner. "I will take him off your hands, and if I find him what you suppose him to be, I'll punish him properly. If not, I'll assist him on his way. Now, for my business. Can you keep a captive for me for a few weeks? I wish to dispose of one!"

"I suppose I can."

"It is not one of the ordinary kind, I assure you. She is a lady and must be comfortably provided for. The least indignity offered to her shall be severely punished."

"A lady!" cried the old Don, opening his eyes with astonishment, and staring at the captain.

"Yes, a lady! There is nothing strange in that. I may as well tell you at once, that it is the niece of Don Ferdinand Xera. I want her confined during my pleasure."

"Holy Virgin! Senor—have you weighed this matter well? Don Ferdinand is very powerful."

"A fig for his power!" cried the captain, snapping his fingers contemptuously. "Do you fear him?"

"He has great influence with the Government."

"No matter for his influence. I doubt it much. He could not even be obeyed in his own household."

"What has the lady said to merit your displeasure?"

"It's not material!" said the captain, with a brow as black as midnight. "Will you keep her for me?"

"I will."

"For me, remember!" and the captain laid a terrible emphasis on the personal pronoun. The old Don started and showed evident symptoms of fear.

"Yes—for you!" he replied. "Your directions shall be followed to the letter. I will hold her against Don Ferdinand's followers, for my own hand will return to-morrow."

"You will have no trouble with Don Ferdinand. He will not suspect me of kidnapping, above all other persons. I will take care that he thinks the girl has run away."

"That will be excellent!" replied Don Francisco. "In that case I shall escape all suspicion."

"Certainly. In case you perform this duty well, you shall not be interrupted in your business—but in case you fail, remember. I hold the sword above your head."

"I shall not fail, I assure you."

"I shall visit her occasionally," said the captain, "and shall therefore have an opportunity of witnessing your manner of keeping a promise. We understand each other?"

"Certainly. When may I expect her?"

"To-morrow night. It may even be past midnight. It may even be as late as the morning hours. Have every thing in readiness, so that we may come when we like."

"It shall be prepared."

"Now lead me to the prisoner. I must retrace my steps to San Juan, as soon as may be."

"Of course you will partake of our poor fare, before you leave?" asked Don Francisco.

"Nay," returned the captain. "I am in no mood for eating. Lead me to the prisoner."

They left the apartment together, and arrived at the door of the Guide's room. Fanchette was awaiting them in great trepidation, for not a syllable of their conversation had escaped him. An opening in the partition had admitted the sounds of their voice to his apartment, with the greatest distinctness.

Don Francisco took a key from his pocket, and opened the door. Minon immediately threw himself into a chair, and with a cold repulsive look, viewed the prisoner from head to foot.

"Are you from Rio Grande?" he asked.

"I am."

"And what errand has brought you here?"

"My mission is private. My orders forbid me to tell."

"But, by the Cross! you must tell," cried the captain fiercely. "I am commander in the valley of San Juan."

"General Ampudia is commander-in-chief," replied the youth, "and I serve him. If you are a soldier, you ought to know I cannot disobey orders without dishonor."

"You speak the truth by the blessed Virgin!" cried the captain, extending his hand toward the Guide. "You are free to go where you please. If you pass through San Juan, do not forget Captain Minon."

Fanchette was surprised at this sudden alteration in tone and demeanor, and so was Don Francisco. The fact was, the captain only looked upon the prisoner as an obstacle in the way of his intentions, and he was anxious to be rid of his presence. At one time he would have delighted in so good an opportunity of exercising his power.

"Let him go, Don Francisco!" he said, turning to this latter worthy. "Let him go. I will answer for him."

The Guide needed no further prompting, but placing his cap upon his head, he thanked the captain for his interference, and bidding Don Francisco conduct him down-stairs, in somewhat a stern tone, he made a low bow, and moved toward the door.

The old Mexican led the way down the stairs, and Captain Minon followed. Fanchette immediately passed out of the court, and inhaled a long draught of the pure air, thanking Providence for his escape, as the gate closed behind him.

When he was a few rods from the walls of the Rancho, Captain Minon passed him at full gallop, and with his hand, waved him another adieu.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERVIEW—THE DETERMINATION—THE FETE—THE AMBUSCADE—THE CAPTIVE.

DON FERDINAND XERA was an early riser, but on the morning after the visit of Captain Minon, he rose before his usual time. His mind was greatly excited on the subject of his niece's refusal of a fine matrimonial offer, and he was so intent upon an interview with her, for the purpose of combating her determination, that he could not sleep. He descended to the lower part of his house, and the servants informed him that the Donna Isabella was yet in bed.

"I will quiet my nerves then, and compose my mind, by a walk up the valley," he muttered.

Accordingly, he passed out of the gate of his Rancho, and leisurely walked toward the village of San Juan. The peasantry were not yet moving, and every thing was still and hushed; consequently, there was nothing to divert the current of the old man's thoughts. To him, the subject was of vast importance.

"I always liked the women—yes—God bless 'em, I always liked them well enough, but I never COULD understand them! What the girl can mean by refusing Minon, the Evil One only knows, unless, as I said last night, she wants to try her power on the poor fellow. Ah! women have no mercy!"

Filled with such reflections, the old man trudged on, until he reached the little grove, where Minon had met with his repulse. The seats looked so tempting, and the air so balmy, that the old man could not resist an inclination to sit for a while in the cool shade. He seated himself upon a rude bench, and was lost in thought of the most perplexing kind, until his attention was called to the gentle caroling of a sweet Spanish ballad.

He at once recognized the voice, and looking up, he saw the Donna Isabella, approaching. She evidently did not observe the old gentleman, for she entered the grove with her eyes bent upon the ground, and did not look up until she observed his form upon the bench. She started back with an exclamation of surprise, but quickly recovering herself, she said:

"My dear uncle! how you surprised me! I did not dream of finding you here!"

"Upon my word," said the old man, "nor did I expect to meet you here!"

"Then it is a mutual surprise."

"Well, well. Sit down here beside me. I have much to say to you. I was coming to your room, but the servants said you were not up. This is the better place after all."

Isabella complied with the old man's request, and seated herself on the bench beside him.

"Did you have a pleasant walk with the captain, last evening? I have not seen you since."

Isabella was pained. She at once divined the subject upon which the old man desired to converse

"The walk was pleasant enough," she answered, evasively. "How could it be otherwise in this beautiful valley?"

"But the society of the captain? I mean the society. Did you find it agreeable?"

"As agreeable as usual. He was never a favorite of mine, and probably never will be."

"I am greatly surprised and disappointed to hear you talk thus, Isabella. I esteem the captain highly."

Isabella was firmly resolved to maintain her ground, and have this annoying matter finally disposed of.

"I am sure I have no objection to your liking him. I have nothing against the man."

"But for a long time I have flattered myself that I should see you united to him."

"Then you DID flatter yourself, for that can never be. I shall not marry Captain Minon."

"But what objections can you urge against him?"

"I have stated my objections to him personally, last evening. I do not love him, and will not wed him."

This was positive enough, and the old man's hope sunk proportionately.

"I regret your decision," he said, "for it pains me very much. I did desire to see you the wife of Minon."

"I am sorry to give you pain, dear uncle. You know I have always gratified you in everything. This is a matter which affects me more deeply than it can you, and I ought to be permitted to make my own choice. Indeed," she added, with quite a display of spirit, "I am determined not to wed him."

"It's a clear case," thought the old man, but he did not give utterance to his convictions. "She won't have him."

"Don't you think you could bring yourself to like him well enough for a husband?" he asked.

"I know I could not. Surely we ought to love our husband, above all others."

This was philosophy the old man was unacquainted with. He was satisfied that further discourse upon the subject, at this time, would only make matters worse, and he said:

"I know you have been a good and dutiful girl, Isabella, and I believe you love your old uncle. You shall not be forced into a marriage that you dislike, but if you COULD bring yourself to have the captain, it would afford me the greatest pleasure. It would, I assure you."

"And I would instantly comply with your desire, did I not know that it would forever destroy my happiness!" cried the grateful girl, delighted by the old man's forbearance.

"Well, we will say no more upon the subject now," he said. "If ever a change should take place in your views—"

"I will not hesitate to inform you of it," she replied, interrupting him.

"Let us return to the house, then. I shall inform the captain of your determination, and, of course, he will forbear to press his suit. It will be a severe blow to him."

Isabella walked beside the old man, and they returned to the Rancho. The breakfast was already in waiting, and they passed on to the room in which it was prepared. To the great surprise of Isabella, she saw the captain sitting by the window, intently poring over the leaves of a music book.

He saluted her distantly, but to the old man he was all smiles. Isabella hurried through the meal, and, making some trifling excuse, she hastened from the room, leaving the gentlemen alone.

As soon as she had departed, the old man opened the conversation. The captain was evidently expecting it.

"Well, Minon, my good fellow, I have had an interview with the girl, as I promised you."

"So I have discovered."

"I spoke to her about her refusal of your hand."

"Well, sir."

"She continues to refuse it, and is so positive in her manner, that I do not believe any good would result from urging her in the matter just at present."

"Indeed!"

"She has promised to inform me if any change takes place in her views. If I were permitted to advise you, I would say, visit her as usual; but forbear all mention of this topic. A little time may work a great change, especially with the mind of a young girl of nineteen. I'll bet a thousand broad pieces that you succeed yet."

This confident assertion was lost upon the captain. With an almost superhuman exertion he smothered his rage, but the effort left frightful traces upon his countenance. His pride was outraged, his self-esteem aroused, and he swore silently a terrible revenge.

"Perhaps," he muttered, "perhaps this forward young minx will refuse me with impunity—ME, who am allied to the best blood of Mexico—whose alliance would reflect honor upon her, as proud as she is—perhaps she will refuse me and escape my vengeance; but the fault will be mine if she does."

Don Ferdinand changed the subject of the discourse, and endeavored to start topics of interest; but the captain was moody and sullen, and after he had heard the conclusion of the interview with his haughty lady-love, he left the mansion and retraced his steps to San Juan.

"Poor fellow!" said Don Ferdinand, as he departed. "It is a terrible blow, and I pity him. Time must cure—for there is no medicine that will reach his case."

There was a medicine, but unfortunately it was beyond the captain's reach.

Donna Isabella was truly happy. A very unpleasant affair was disposed of, and henceforth she should not dread meeting the captain. They understood each other now, and she should no longer be obliged to listen to his fulsome flatteries and unmeaning compliments, nor endure his senseless twaddle with which he used to afflict her. To all intents and purposes, she was free!

She seized her guitar, and played and sung, and laughed, and gave herself up to a joyous flow of spirits. What a blessing it is that we cannot see the future!

The next day was the Fete day! The little church at San Juan was to be tastefully decorated, and in the evening a grand illumination was to take place. The happy girl was resolved to attend, and in order to appear as pretty as possible—a very natural vanity for a Spanish maiden—she resolved to prepare her dresses at once. So she threw aside her guitar, and forthwith commenced preparations for the fete. Her servant was called to her assistance, and the parlor in which she sat was strewn with silks and ribbons.

Captain Minon's house was in the principal street of San Juan, and immediately adjoining the church. When he left Don Ferdinand's Rancho, he went immediately to it, and entered the little sitting-room that adjoined the sleeping apartment.

Then he gave himself up to reflection. It was a most unpleasant reflection. Rage, love, jealousy, and a desire for revenge. These were riotous companions for one breast, as the captain experienced. After he had suffered the torments they inflicted upon him for some time, he jumped up, and paced the room with a rapid step. His servant saw that he was fearfully excited, and he very wisely withdrew and left him alone.

"Something must be done! By the Holy Cross, something shall be done at once!" he exclaimed. "I will not endure such treatment tamely, for it would reflect dishonor upon a Mexican gentleman. I'll be revenged!"

He stepped to the door and called his servant. The man came as if to receive the doom of death, for he knew his master's fearful temper.

"Go and tell my lieutenant, Don Jose Velasquez, to come to me at once!"

The servant departed in great haste.

"By the mass! I'll carry her off, and she shall never see the lovely valley of San Juan again, until she is my bride. Velasquez will assist me, for he is in my power. We shall see if I cannot bend the stubborn pride of the lady."

Velasquez entered the room, and the excited captain requested him to be seated. The lieutenant complied, and wondered greatly what had so excited his commander.

"Velasquez!" said the captain, seating himself by the officer's side, "I want you to assist me in a desperate undertaking. Can I depend upon you?"

"To be sure you can." And the wretch, who looked the unprincipled villain he really was, grinned most horribly.

"The game is somewhat desperate; nevertheless, I am determined to undertake it."

"Mention it," said the subaltern.

"To-morrow is Fete day, is it not?"

"It is."

"Well then; to-morrow night, I want you to seize a young lady in the street and carry her off!"

Velasquez was thunderstruck! He stared at his master, to assure himself of his sanity.

"You look surprised," continued the captain, "but I assure you I am in earnest."

"Indeed!"

"Will you assist me?"

"Who is the lady?"

"Donna Isabella Xera!"

"DONNA ISABELLA XERA!" repeated Don Jose, unable to restrain his wonder.

"No other, I assure you! Listen to me. I love that woman, Velasquez. I have offered her my heart, hand, and fortune, AND SHE HAS REFUSED THEM! Refused them haughtily. Her uncle even condescended to entreat her to alter her determination, but SHE EVEN REFUSED HIM! Curse on her beauty, she even REFUSED HIM, I say. I cannot and WILL NOT endure this. It is a stain upon my honor—an insult that MUST be avenged. I have resolved to carry her off, and I SWEAR by the HOLY MASS, she shall not return to her uncle's Rancho, until she is my wife! Now you know all. Will you assist me?"

"To be sure I will! What can possess the girl to act thus? Does she love another?"

"I know not, and CARE NOT!" said the captain. "Mine she SHALL BE, at all hazards."

"So you propose to carry her off?"

"Yes. She will undoubtedly attend the fete. You must prepare some of our troops to assist you, and arrange an ambush between the village and the Rancho. She will only be accompanied by a servant, and can be easily secured. Then she must be placed on a horse and taken to a place of security."

"Where will that be?"

"This very day I intend to visit the old robber Morales. I can confine her in his lair, for he will not dare to refuse me. I fancy that a few weeks' residence in that abode, will humble her pride a little. The moment that she becomes my wife, she shall be restored to liberty. Until that time, she shall remain in my power!"

"But Don Ferdinand! he will massacre the whole of us. He loves his niece they say. He will scour the country from the Rio Grande to the Capital."

"Never fear for Don Ferdinand. I intend to manage it so that he will not suspect us. Have you been to the robber's Rancho?"

"To Morales' den?"

"Yes."

"Frequently."

"To you I give the charge of conducting her thither. I must remain at home to evade suspicion. Meet me here to-morrow morning and tell me your arrangements."

"I will."

The lieutenant departed, and Captain Minon ordered his horse. He was soon brought to the door, and the captain started for the Rancho of Don Francisco Morales, the robber. With the result of his visit there, the reader is already acquainted.

It was very late at night when he arrived at home again, and he sought his bed, completely exhausted with the toils of the day.

The morning of the Fete day dawned bright and fair. At a very early hour the peasantry and laborers of the surrounding country came prancing into the village, causing a dense crowd in the miniature street. Mirth and rejoicing reigned supreme, and the merry laugh and innocent joy, resounded on every side.

Punctual to his agreement, Don Jose Velasquez appeared at the door of the captain's house, before that latter worthy had arisen. He told the servant that his business would admit of no delay, and he was consequently admitted at once to the captain's bedroom. Minon was awake, and stretched forth his hand to greet his subaltern.

"Punctual, I see."

"Always attending to duty!" replied the captain.

"I will rise," said the captain.

A recollection of the day's work before him, had a tendency to accelerate the captain's motions, and he was soon dressed and in the little sitting-room.

"Now, Velasquez," said he, "let's hear how you come on with your part of the enterprise. Mine is all arranged to my special liking. Have you selected your men?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Six. It is not probable that I shall need as many; but then I like to be prepared for an emergency."

"That's proper. Have you enjoined the

strictest secrecy upon them? That is important."

"The bastriado will deter them from gossiping. I will be responsible for their caution."

"Have you selected an ambuscade?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"The little grove between the village and the Rancho."

"Admirable! That is where the haughty dame refused me. It is a most proper selection. Can you conceal the horses there? If they are seen it might excite suspicion."

"We can conceal them there. In fact, for that reason I selected the grove. Otherwise it is too near the Rancho."

"I had not thought of that!"

"I had, but I will risk it as it is. I have prepared a gag which we shall apply the moment we seize her. She will thus be prevented from making an alarm."

"But the servant may make an outcry."

"The servant will be attended to. Give us one-half hour in the chance, and we care not who pursues us."

"So be it. I know our steeds are fleet, and we have more than once had occasion to try their bottom."

"Of course there is no doubt but that Donna Isabella will attend the fete?"

"Certainly not. She MUST attend."

"I thought it better to defer the attempt until she was returning to her home after the illumination. In the confusion attendant upon the separation of the crowd we will be least likely to be disturbed."

"That is the time. You must take your position soon after dark, and await her coming. As soon as she is secured, away to the Rancho of Don Francisco Morales."

"You may rely upon me," said the lieutenant, and he left the apartment. A servant entered and summoned the captain to his morning meal.

"That Velasquez is a most excellent lieutenant," muttered the captain. "By the mass, if he performs his task well, the poor devil shall be promoted."

Satisfied with his plans, and anticipating the most complete success, the captain sat down to his breakfast.

Bright and early the Donna Isabella was astir and dressed for the fete. She bustled about the apartments, hurried the servants with the breakfast, and gave other tokens of impatience; and well she might, for what Mexican lady ever failed to enjoy a fete—one of those joyous holidays of the church—to the utmost?

With the first chime of the church-bells she departed on foot from the Rancho. The old servant, infirm and in his dotage, accompanied her, more for an appendage than for any service he could render, for the Donna had no fears. She was perfectly unsuspecting of danger; for who would dream of carrying off a female within sight of a thronged village, and the tall chimneys of her own dwelling? No one, but a Spaniard, smarting under the pangs of unrequited love and panting for revenge!

Full of the brightest anticipations, Isabella reached the village and obtained a seat in the Plaza in front of the church. She was the "observed of all observers," for aside from her rare beauty, her gentle manners and great kindness of heart had made her a universal favorite with the peasantry, and she was well known for miles around; every one loved the Donna Isabella.

The sports of the day, and the religious ceremonies of the priests and monks went off admirably. The shades of night drew on, and then the dance and the song ceased, and expectation was turned to the grand illumination which was next in order of performances. It was also designated to be the greatest spectacle of all.

The daylight lingered most provokingly to the anxious crowd, but at last, even the tips of the distant hills were shrouded in darkness. Then the display took place, and by its brilliancy and splendor, amply compensated for the time it had been deferred. The whole village was wrapped in a blaze, and presented a most magnificent and fiery-like appearance. The river looked like a pool of melted gold, while the fields and groves about were hidden in the deepest gloom. Isabella enjoyed the scene and could not restrain a sigh when the exhibition broke up.

Accompanied by her servant, the fair girl started homeward. She experienced no difficulty in escaping from the crowd, for everybody made room for her, and she soon reached the green banks of the San Juan and walked toward the Rancho. She kept up a brisk conversation with the servant, for notwithstanding he was deaf and as dull as a donkey, she must relate the enjoyment to some one.

Her progress was slow, for the old servant walked with difficulty. By and by they reached the grove, and Isabella was thinking of the two interviews she had so lately been a party to, in the pretty little spot, when a dark form issued from the shadows of the trees, and approached her. She uttered a faint scream, but a rude hand was placed over her mouth and she was thrown upon the grass.

The frightened girl struggled desperately, but in spite of her exertions a gag was thrust into her mouth, her hands were secured behind her and then she was raised from the ground and placed upon the back of a powerful horse, in front of a stout man, who rudely encircled her waist with his arm, and putting spurs to his animal galloped furiously down the valley followed by some half dozen comrades.

All this took place in a few moments. Not a word had been spoken, nor could the alarmed maiden see what had befallen her old servant. Her captors were most effectually disguised, and she came to the conclusion that she was in the hands of one of the numerous gangs of robbers that were prowling round the country.

This conviction was painful, but it was irresistible. Who else but a robber and an outlaw, would assault an unoffending girl?

The cavalcade dashed on, down the valley of the San Juan. They passed ravines, woods, dark dells, and lonely plains, but they made no halt. Whenever a steed gave token of weariness, the spur was applied, and his exertions were renewed.

In this rapid riding, several hours were passed. At length they came in sight of a Rancho, and to the great relief of the maiden, her captors reined in, and alighted in front of the gate. A summons from the leader, caused the gates to be opened, and Donna Isabella was taken from her horse, the gag removed from her mouth, and she turned over to the custody of a repulsive-looking desperado, who stood by, with a large lamp in his hand. He turned to the leader of the horsemen, and asked:

"Is this the prisoner I was to expect?"

The horseman nodded, and the old man continued:

"I have received my instructions, and will attend to her. Follow me!" he said, turning to Isabella.

As well as her wearied limbs would permit, the poor girl followed him, up a filthy and winding staircase, to an upper room. The door was unlocked and she was told to enter the apartment. Mechanically she obeyed—the door was closed, and she was left to darkness.

Her jailer descended to the court, and approached the horsemen, who were remounting their wearied steeds to return.

"Surely," said the old man, "you will not leave us until you have rested both yourselves and your horses?"

"We must not tarry," said Don Jose Velasquez, who did not hesitate to speak, now that Donna Isabella was absent. "Before the morning of the day, we must be in bed in San Juan."

"When may I expect Captain Minon?" asked Morales, for the old man was none other than the robber.

"I cannot tell. It will depend on circumstances. You must keep a sharp eye upon the prisoner, for if she escapes the captain will come before you wish to see him."

"Do not fear for the prisoner, Don Jose," returned the old man. "I only wish I had the barbarians on the Rio Grande half as safe. She cannot escape me."

The horsemen left the yard, and returned toward San Juan, and the old man closed the gates of the Rancho.

"It must be near morning now," muttered the old robber, as he entered the house. "The girl will do well enough until morning. Then I suppose I must make her quarters more comfortable."

And acting upon this determination, he did not visit Isabella's room again that night, but hastened to bed, leaving the melancholy captive to her reflections.

CHAPTER V.

THE RECAPTURE—THE COMPANION—THE MAIDEN'S LOVE—THE FLIGHT.

THE Prairie Guide did not travel far after Captain Minon had passed him, before he seated himself upon the fragrant grass, to determine the course he should pursue.

"There is no more danger from that old devil of the den," said he. "That dashing horseman is a man of authority, and the old ruffian fears him. I will even rest here, and consider what to do."

To pursue the valley of the San Juan was the nearest and the safest route to Monterey. It was decidedly a rural district, and he would be less liable to interruption, than in any other region. His first adventure had terminated most flatteringly, and he resolved to proceed upon his journey, and trust to fortune for the supplies he might need. He therefore arose, and was about commencing his walk, when he was seized by the collar, and violently thrown upon the ground.

Let us go back to the Rancho of Don Francisco Morales immediately after Captain Minon left it, on the day he had set Fanchette at liberty.

After the captain galloped out of the yard, Morales and Gonzalvo were left standing by the gate. A terrible frown was upon the old man's brow, and it was evident that his ire was excited.

"May the curses of the Apostles light upon that Captain Minon!" he exclaimed. "He is as important and lordly as an emperor could be. The villain treats me as if I were his dog! He liberates my prisoner and transforms my Rancho into a jail!"

"Why do you permit it?" asked Gonzalvo.

"Permit it! the devil!" cried the old man. "If I refused, he would be down upon me with his military. I tell you, Gonzalvo, I am forced to submit."

"Captain Minon has but one troop," replied the servant. "I am sure our men are a match for them. They could hold the Rancho in spite of him."

"Pooh! you talk idle. The captain could turn all the hell-hounds of the Government upon us. It is idle to resist him. As much as I hate him, I am compelled to obey."

"But at all events, you need not lose this prisoner," said Gonzalvo. "Captain Minon has gone, and the young man sits on the grass yonder. If we secure him again, no one need be informed of it. If he is a Government agent, he has plenty of gold, without doubt."

"What do you say! Is he in sight?" asked Morales, interested in the proposition of his servant.

"Yes, yonder he sits."

"By the cross, I will follow your suggestion. Follow and assist me, for he is young and vigorous, though I believe he is unarmed. I will not be balked of my prey!"

"Wait until I get the cords," said Gonzalvo, and he hobbled into the house.

He returned in a few moments, bearing in his hand a stout cord, that was fashioned to secure the arms of prisoners. Morales unsheathed a long knife, and the two sallied out into the valley in the direction of the guide.

Without making an alarm, they approached the unconscious Fanchette, seized him by the collar, and threw him upon the ground, as we have already said.

The youth raised his eyes the moment that he struck the earth, and perceived Morales bending over him, with his keen knife ready to strike in case he resisted, while Gonzalvo was busy in preparing the cord for his arms.

His own weapons were beneath the folds of his frock, and he saw that any attempt to obtain them would be the signal for Morales to use his knife. He therefore made no resistance, and Gonzalvo secured his arms.

"Arise!" said Morales, in a fierce tone. "You do not escape me so easily."

The youth felt that it would be folly to evince any symptoms of a refractory spirit, and he complied with this command.

"Lead the way to the Rancho, Gonzalvo," continued the old man, "and you follow, Señor La Ronge! You shall be escorted to your old quarters, and we will see if Captain Minon will again interfere. March!"

Fanchette followed in the steps of Gonzalvo, and Don Francisco brought up the rear. In this manner they entered the court of the Rancho, and once more the Guide saw the gates closed upon him. He was speedily conducted to the apartment that he formerly occupied.

"At least you will free my arms?" he said, turning to Don Francisco. "These walls are sufficient security for my person."

The old Mexican made no reply, but slammed the door violently and turned the bolt. Fanchette heard him descending the stairs, and then seated himself.

"At all events," he said, "I will try these bonds myself. The hind cord is becoming painful."

The removal of his hempen fetters was a work of labor. Yet he persevered in his efforts, and at last freed himself. Then he took his position at the little window again, to gaze upon the freedom he had so unexpectedly gained, and so suddenly lost.

When the shades of evening were creeping over the valley, Don Francisco and Gonzalvo entered the apartment, bearing him a tray of food, and a large stone vessel filled with water. The old man started, and flourished his long knife, when he saw that the prisoner was unbound, and the cords were lying about the floor.

"Who removed these cords?" he asked fiercely.

"I did!" replied the Guide.

"No matter," said the old man, "I should have done it myself at a proper time. You will gain nothing by resistance!"

Fanchette made no reply. Now that his arms were free he felt content to await the progress of events.

Gonzalvo deposited the tray and the pitcher upon the table, and then he left the room. Don Francisco retreated to the doorway, where he remained until the return of the servant.

Presently he came, bearing upon his back a coarse sack, filled with dried grass. This he threw down in one corner of the apartment, and the old man observed:

"There is your bed. When my friends, who are absent on the mountains, return, I will examine your case."

Without waiting for a reply, the old robber and his servant withdrew, and left the Guide alone.

"Perhaps, old villain," he muttered, as they were descending the stairs, "I shall not be here, when your friends return."

The Guide felt no appetite for his supper. Indeed, his situation was no more calculated to excite an appetite, than was the appearance of his cooks, so he contented himself with a draught of water, and then he threw himself upon his bed. In thinking over the vicissitudes of his past life, he fell asleep, and did not awake until the rays of the morning sun penetrated the little window of his prison.

With many symptoms of repugnance, he approached the table, and examined the contents of the tray. His stomach was clamorous for sustenance. In addition to the black bread and eggs, it contained some pieces of meat, and by dint of rapid motions, and keeping his mind employed in other matters, he managed to partake lightly. Another drink from the pitcher concluded his repast.

Neither Don Francisco or Gonzalvo visited him, until nearly dark. Then they came together, for they dared not venture alone, and brought him another supply of provisions, and more water. They made no tarry, but left the room as soon as possible, without exchanging a word with him. Soon after their departure, he again reclined upon the bag of dried grass, and slept.

Late at night he was aroused from his slumbers, by the furious clatter of horses' feet. He arose from his bed, and looked out at the window, but he could discover nothing, for the court was on the opposite side of the house. Presently he heard footsteps ascending the stair-case and then the door of his room was opened, and some one entered.

He heard the door close again—heard the bolt rattle in the socket and then a sob and a moan caught his ear.

"I have it," he thought, "That Captain Minon has come with his prisoner."

The Guide maintained the most rigid silence. Indeed, he knew not what to say. Save in the immediate neighborhood of the little window, there was not a ray of light in the little room. All beyond it was as black as midnight.

Donna Isabella, for it was she, who had been ushered into the room, groped around and found a chair. She seated herself upon it, and thinking she was alone in the dismal place, she gave unrestrained vent to her grief, and sobbed and moaned most piteously. Fanchette would gladly have consoled her, but he was

utterly at a loss how to introduce himself to her notice.

In this perplexing and painful situation, he remained until morning. In reality it was not a long time in coming, but the young man fancied that the moments never hung so heavily.

For a long time after the bright rays crept over the cold floors and walls of the prison, he could not get a view of his companion's face. It was concealed by a dark veil, and besides, her head had fallen forward upon her breast, and he could not discern her features. In this position she remained without noticing his presence, until the sun climbed over the distant mountain tops, and threw a flood of rich, golden light into the dingy room.

Then she raised her head, threw back her veil, and gazed at him.

Fanchette started, as if he had received an electric shock. Never before had he seen such surpassing beauty! And these charms were heightened, too, by the fact of her being plunged in such dark distress. If an angel had entered the dreary room, he could not have been more completely surprised.

The fair cheek, yet wet with tears—the dark locks, disheveled from her long ride, and her struggles with her captors—the dark eye, the fires of which were subdued by melancholy, made an impression upon the young man's heart, that time could never efface. All his sympathies were at once enlisted in her favor.

Great as was the Guide's surprise, it could not exceed Isabella's. Who could the stranger be? She had never, in her life, seen so handsome and noble-looking a young man. Could he be one of the villains who had stolen her from her home, and her friends? Oh! no. She felt that he was far too noble for that.

What, then, could he be doing in that place. Was he a prisoner like herself? Perhaps he was, and she felt even a feeling of satisfaction, that chance had bestowed upon her so handsome a companion. She would not be confined in solitude, she thought, and there was much consolation in the reflection.

A silence of some moments ensued, after the prisoners discovered each other. Isabella did not immediately recover from the surprise this stranger's presence occasioned her. He would, at first, have essayed to address her. He was fearful that so fair a being, in so strange a situation, would repel his advances with scorn.

Diffidence, however, could not long restrain the ardent feelings of the Guide. He determined to commence a conversation with the lady, and if possible, learn her history. He already knew by whose agency she had been brought to her present situation, but he knew nothing of the motives that had prompted it.

"Are you a prisoner, too?" he asked, in Spanish, assuming the most respectful tone he could command.

"Alas! senor," she replied, as the tears filled her eyes, "I am a prisoner."

"Then I can feel for you. For two dreary days, which have seemed as months to me, I have been confined here. How much longer it will continue, I cannot tell."

"Into whose hands have we fallen?" asked Isabella.

"I do not know, except from circumstances that have transpired since I have been here. I think our jailor is the captain of a band of robbers."

"I thought as much," replied Isabella, "but what can he want of my person? Does he think to get a ransom for my return to my friends, or has he other objects in view?"

"The owner of this Rancho is only your jailor," replied the Guide. "He is employed not by another man!"

"Then I was taken by robbers?" asked the maiden, greatly surprised.

"I should think not, to judge from a conversation I heard, a day or two since."

"Oh! will you tell me, senor?" cried Isabella, moving her chair nearer to the Guide, in her eagerness to listen.

"I have no objections. I can only tell by whose influence you were brought here. I know nothing of the reasons."

"Tell me who!"

"A Captain Minon contracted for your safe custody, with the old villain that keeps this Rancho."

Isabella was astounded! The whole truth flashed upon her, and she saw at once the design of her detested lover. She had not entertained

a suspicion before, that he had any agency in her misfortune, but now she was convinced.

"Captain Minon!" she exclaimed, and the blood forsook her cheek, as she elevated her hands.

"That is the name he gave himself."

"The perfidious villain!"

"Then you know him?"

"Know him!" cried the maiden, her eyes flashing, and her lip curling with scorn. "Only a few days ago he solicited—"

She ceased speaking. The blood rushed tumultuously through her veins, and she hung down her head, as if ashamed of what she had been going to utter.

She had said enough, however. The Guide readily divined the rest of her sentence, and said:

"Solicited your hand and you refused it. That's what you would have said. I am sure there is nothing in all that to be ashamed of. If you did not love him, you did perfectly right in refusing him. Do you not think so?"

There was something of selfishness in this inquiry.

"Oh! I did not love him, senor!" cried the maiden, with simple earnestness, yet blushing still more deeply.

"This is the method he takes to excite your love!" replied the Guide, with a quiet smile.

"Love him!" said Isabella, endeavoring to shake off her embarrassment. "I shall never love him!"

The young man had been but a few moments acquainted with the fair being beside him; in fact, he did not even know her name, yet this assurance afforded him a secret satisfaction that he could not account for.

Their further conference was interrupted by the arrival of Don Francisco, and Gonzalvo. They brought a further supply of provisions, and the Guide was happy to observe that it was of finer quality, and more abundant, than that previously furnished. Some coffee of a most delicious fragrance was also procured, and Gonzalvo dispatched for another bed.

"I shall be obliged to keep you both in one room for a few days," said the robber. "Then you shall have separate apartments. The first attempt that you make at escape, is a signal for your execution. My own life depends upon your safe-keeping, and I am determined not to be trifled with."

With this solemn warning, the old vagabond departed, and the prisoners were again alone.

Their first care was to test the cheer that had been provided for them. Isabella had not yet recovered from her fatigue and fright, and she partook but sparingly, but the Guide felt his appetite increase with the improvement of his fare, and he ate heartily. After the meal, he proffered Isabella a seat by the window, and placed a chair for himself beside her.

The friendships of innocent and uncontaminated youth, soon ripen into confidences. The cold and chilling rules of modern politeness forbid such happy consummations in social life, but the gushing sympathies of a generous, youthful heart laughs them to scorn, and pursues the natural channel. Before the close of the day, a deep and fervent attachment had sprung up in the heart of the Guide, for the fair companion of his captivity.

From her own lips, he had learned the whole of her little history. Situated as she had been, there was nothing wonderfully romantic or exciting, but it was deeply interesting to Fanchette, for its lights and shadows, its accidents and events, furnished him with a perfect knowledge of her high and generous qualities, and of her "guileless simplicity of soul."

How was it with the Donna Isabella?

Born in that generous clime that "lays nearest to the sun," where both the person and the passions are the growth of a short time, and where the latter early acquire a dominant mastery—there was no middle or moderate course for her to pursue. At first she was pleased with her companion—then she was interested in him—then, with all the ardor of a soul capable of the greatest extremes of passion—she loved him!

And all these changes and gradations, she had passed through in a few short hours.

They did not long conceal these passions from each other; indeed, they did not attempt it. They made mutual declarations and confessions, and notwithstanding the gloomy walls of a prison were around her, and she was separated from her friends, Isabella was as happy in her new passion as her heart could be.

Fanchette's love was not less deep and abiding than Isabella's, yet it was not so warm and fierce. He was yet capable of serious reflection, and more than once, he asked himself:

"Where will this end? What will become of my mission, to which my commander attaches so much importance?"

He did not stop to answer these questions definitely. He merely determined to prosecute his mission to the end, and that quieted his conscience. As to the idea of relinquishing the bright being at his side, his heart would not hear to it, and so he dismissed the subject at once.

The whole day, and the early hours of the night, were given up to the enjoyments of love. When at length they did retire to their humble beds, it was not to sleep, until their imaginations were revived in picturing the delights of the strange, new feelings.

The Guide was awake before the day dawned. With the remembrance of his situation came the remembrance of the errand that had brought him to that region. He felt that he was bound in honor to make his escape and pursue his journey if possible, and he did not doubt but he could effect his escape if he seriously set himself about it.

From the conversation that he had heard between Don Francisco and Captain Minon, and from sentences that the old man had let fall, while visiting his room, the young man knew that a gang of robbers, who were now out upon an excursion, were expected to return; and he also knew that the Rancho was their headquarters. Consequently, if he intended to attempt his escape at all, it stood him in hand to make the trial before their return. If he deferred it until after that event took place, the odds would be against him, and he would probably fail.

What, in the meantime, should he do with Isabella? Could he leave her behind? In his absence she would be completely at the mercy of the old man and Gonzalvo, and he dared not think of the fate they might bestow upon her. He was bound by every tie of love, honor, and generosity, he thought, to provide for her escape as well as his own.

How should he effect his escape? This was the next question that occurred, but it was soon answered. There was but one way. He must assail his jailor, as he had determined to do before Minon set him free, and make his escape that way. It was idle to think of breaking the walls, or of making his exit by stealth. It must be done by force, and he was prepared to give it a trial, provided Isabella would consent to the attempt.

When Isabella arose, he unfolded his plans to her. The moment he spoke of freedom, and spoke of the possibility of obtaining it, the maiden was delighted, and promised to be governed by him in all things. If she could reach her uncle's Rancho once more, she would take immediate steps to punish the groveling author of her misfortunes.

From Isabella he learned that the distance to San Juan could not be great, and that the valley of the river afforded abundance of places for security in case they should be pursued. Once at San Juan, and the further journey to Monterey was almost without an obstacle. He determined to attempt an escape.

"If you think yourself equal to the task," he said, turning to Isabella, after he had determined upon attempting the adventure, "I will try it this very morning!"

"With all my heart, senor! With you I can undertake anything. Let us get out of this frightful place as soon as possible. Yet, I must say I have been very happy here!"

She looked tenderly into the face of the Guide, and, unable to restrain the impulse that prompted him, he stooped and kissed her lips. To his inexpressible delight, he was not reproved.

At the usual hour he heard the steps of Don Francisco and his servant upon the stairs. Turning hastily toward Isabella, he whispered in her ear:

"Do not fear—the time has come. I feel confident that these men are cowards, and will not resist. If they do, the worst is for themselves; obey my instructions!"

Placing his hands beneath the folds of his frock, the Guide drew forth his pistols and prepared them for service. He placed himself in front of the door, and coolly awaited the arrival of his expected visitors. Isabella endeavored to be firm and fearless, but, despite

the attempt, her limbs trembled and her cheek paled.

Presently the door opened, and Don Francisco, followed by Gonzalvo, entered. The old man did not suspect mischief, for he was not armed, and entered the room before he noticed the pistols in the hands of the Guide. When he saw them, he made a sudden movement toward the door, but the stern tones of Fanchette's voice brought him to a full stop.

"Stand!" shouted he. "If either of you pass that door you are dead men."

The old man was frightened, and stood as immovable as a statue. Gonzalvo crossed himself, and seemed, by the convulsive movements of his features, to be bidding this world a final and heartrending farewell.

"Come, Isabella," said the Guide. "Let us leave this abode. I will be jailer myself!"

Isabella needed no second bidding. She passed through the door, followed by her lover. The key yet remained in the lock, and the Guide, closing the door behind him, shoved the bolt. Thus, without an effort to prevent it, Don Francisco Morales and his servant, Gonzalvo, were made prisoners in their own Rancho.

"This is no place for us to tarry," said Fanchette. "Give me your arm, and I will try to conduct you down the staircase. I have passed over the ground often enough to be a pilot by this time. Come this way."

With great caution they descended the staircase and emerged into the open court. They found the gates fastened, but fortune favored them again. The keys were in the locks. They were soon opened, and once more did the Guide emerge into the valley, freed from prison.

"Now," said he, "let us push on to San Juan. The old robber and his servant will soon find means to escape, and then we shall be pursued. For them I would not care; but they may procure assistance, and then the odds are against me. We shall be more safe in the neighborhood of the glens and valleys you mentioned to me."

Hand in hand they started up the valley. The consciousness that they were flying from danger stimulated their exertions. The Guide afforded all the assistance of which his strong arm was capable, and carried her over the chasms and rough places that obstructed their path.

When the dingy walls of the old Rancho could no longer be seen, Isabella rejoiced.

"It seems to me," she said, "that the danger is passed now. Those old walls do not appear to frown upon me."

"We are not beyond the reach of pursuit," replied the Guide, "and every moment is important. We will keep up our exertions until you are weary."

It was high noon before they halted. Then Isabella's strength began to fail her, and they sat down on the banks of the river near the entrance to a dark defile.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ALARM—THE SEARCH—THE ARRIVAL—THE SURPRISE.

WHEN Don Jose Velasquez and the ruffians of his company seized the Donna Isabella, they also threw the old servant upon the ground and gagged him. When they started off with his mistress, they left the old man lying upon the ground, and he, thinking they were robbers and that his life depended upon his silence, made no attempt at an outcry.

As soon, however, as the galloping of their horses sounded in the distance, he arose, for he was unhurt, and seizing his staff, he made the best of his way to the Rancho, with the gag yet fast in his mouth. Not knowing but he should be again attacked, he walked with a speed remarkable for a man of his infirmities, and as soon as he arrived he hurried to his master's presence.

The old gentleman was sitting at a table, looking over a book of accounts with great intentness, and paid no sort of heed to the old man's entrance. He approached very near to the table, and halted, but still the old man paid no attention to him.

Something must be done. The servant could not speak on account of the gag. At length it occurred to his dull brain, that he would strike the table with his cane, but he was awkward and infirm, and in the attempt he hit Don Ferdinand a tremendous blow on the head. This aroused the old man's attention effectually, and he jumped up in a most terrible rage.

"By the Blessed Virgin!" he cried, briskly rubbing his bald head, "what do you mean you old scoundrel?"

Another whack of the cane, was all the reply he received, for the old servant was getting desperate.

"May the saints protect me!" he cried, "there is rebellion in my household! What has occurred?"

Fearing another application of the stick, Don Ferdinand looked up at his servant and for the first time, perceived the situation he was in. His mouth was opened to its utmost limits, and his eyes protruded far out of his head.

"What HAS occurred?" cried the old man, his surprise more than ever increased.

The servant pointed to the gag, with a mute appeal for its removal. Don Ferdinand took the hint, and drawing his knife from his pocket, he approached the servant, and cut the cord that held it. It fell upon the floor, and the servant's jaws went together with a loud noise.

"Now tell me what all this means?" said Don Ferdinand. "Tell me what it means, and thank the saints that I did not kill you for striking me!"

"The Donna Isabella is stolen!" replied the servant. "Taken off by robbers. I saw it myself."

Surprise held Don Ferdinand speechless.

"We were returning from the fete," pursued the old man, "and just as we reached the little grove, upon the banks of the river, a party rushed upon us, and seizing my poor mistress they departed as swiftly as their horses could gallop."

"Arouse the servants," cried the old man. "Get out the horses. One of you return to the village and spread the alarm. Minon will assist us with his cavalry. Hasten, I say, for we can yet overtake the villains!"

The servant very well knew that his master was a man of decision and he at once departed upon his errand. A few minutes sufficed to alarm the household, and a dozen horses, saddled for the chase, were in the court. A young man hastened to the village, and jumping upon a stand in the Plaza, he exclaimed:

"Citizens! Don Ferdinand Xera requires your assistance! The Donna Isabella has just been seized; on the way to the Rancho, and carried off by robbers. We want to make an immediate pursuit. The villains have fled down the valley!"

The Plaza was yet thronged with men and women, as were the principal streets. This announcement caused great excitement, for, as we have said, everybody knew the Donna Isabella, and everybody loved her for her virtues. The men swore most bitterly, and the women screamed and wrung their hands.

Large parties quickly formed themselves, and started down the valley in quest of the marauders.

As soon as the servant had delivered his message in the Plaza, he hastened to the apartment of Captain Minon, the commander of the lancers. The captain was sitting very much at his ease when the man entered, and no one could seem more surprised than he did, to hear of the maiden's misfortune. He swore a terrible oath of vengeance on the robbers, and at once started to the quarters of his troops to prepare them for the pursuit.

All night long was the sweet little valley of San Juan, and the lines of rough hills that skirted it on either side, scoured by different parties in pursuit of the villains and their victim. All search was idle, however, for they could not obtain even a trace of the route that had been taken. By daylight, they had all assembled at the Rancho of Don Ferdinand, each party adding to the old man's heaviness of heart, by the unsatisfactory report they brought of their search.

"Great God! what will become of the poor girl!" cried the old man, as the big tears rolled down his cheeks, and moistened his gray beard. "She will certainly be murdered!"

"Not so," said Captain Minon, who appeared to be profoundly afflicted, but who attempted to console the old man, notwithstanding. "They will not dare to murder her. Believe me, their only object is to obtain a ransom. I'll answer for the lady's safety with my own head!"

Don Ferdinand placed great confidence in the opinion of the captain of the lancers. The peasantry and the citizens were dismissed after they had been provided with refreshments, and thanked for the assistance they had rendered,

but they returned to their homes with heavy, heavy hearts. They felt most deeply the loss of their favorite.

The servants of Don Ferdinand, and the Mexican captain's lancers pursued the search through all the day and the following night, but it was useless. They returned wearied and disheartened, without any tidings of Donna Isabella.

"What can I do?" asked the old man of Captain Minon, when further efforts at discovery were abandoned as fruitless. "Must she be left in the hands of the rascals?"

"Further search is useless just at this time," replied the captain. "Indeed, I think we had better let the excitement subside, and the desperadoes will bethink them of some scheme whereby to obtain their ransom, for I am confident that is ALL their object. In the meantime, I will pursue a system of inquiries in a private manner. We must be now silent in the matter, though I swear by the holy Cross that I will not relinquish my efforts until the Donna Isabella is restored in safety to your arms!"

"What an excellent man!" thought Don Ferdinand; "and this, too, after she has absolutely refused his hand. If she DOES return, and refuses to have him, I will disown her. Such an excellent heart should not go wounded!"

"You may depend upon it," continued the captain; "a few days will bring us some tidings of her!"

"May the saints so will it!" said the old man, deeply affected. "I would give half my fortune this moment, if she was here, and I could have an assurance of her safety from her own lips. However, you console me much."

Minon departed for his home, after the conclusion of this interview. He had already conversed with Jose, his lieutenant, and learned that the maiden was safely deposited with Don Francisco Morales. In a few days he intended to pay a visit and ascertain how far captivity had softened her pride.

"I cannot fail to succeed now," he said to himself with a chuckle of delight. One so young and inexperienced as she is, will readily enough consent to any sacrifice to escape from a prison and enjoy perfect freedom. That old den, too, is the most lonely and terrible in all Mexico."

Minon was not much of a philosopher, or he would have remembered that

"Disappointment lurks in many a prize."

Now that he had succeeded at the outset, he did not dream of the possibility of future failure!

On the evening of the day that followed these reflections, he again visited the Rancho of Don Ferdinand. The old gentleman was in his own apartment, and when the captain entered, he found him gloomy and sad, just as he had expected.

"Any news from our fair lady?" he asked as he threw himself into a chair.

"None!" replied the old man, with a melancholy shake of the head. "I fear I never shall."

"Pooh! Do not talk thus. For my part, I feel more confident than ever of again beholding her."

"Well, it may be," replied the old man, "yet this suspense is very painful, very painful, indeed."

"My excellent lieutenant, Don Jose Velasquez, was out upon the mountains the very night she was captured. He saw nothing of the robbers, but from some observations that he made I am inclined to believe that I have some clew to her locality."

"The Virgin be praised!" cried the old man; "can you hope to obtain her with force or money?"

"There is nothing easier. To-morrow I mean to extend my observations further, and if it is as I suppose, I shall not fail to inform you at once."

"Most excellent Minon!" cried the old man, "how can I ever repay you for your kindness? If the Donna Isabella persists in refusing your hand, after this, she is unworthy the name of Xera, and I will disown her!"

Minon was delighted.

"Say nothing about my suit, Don Ferdinand! Let us first find the poor girl. After that we will determine on other matters. I cannot rest while her fate is shrouded in mystery."

"The Lord knows I wish you every success. If any one can outwit the banditti, I am sure

it is you. I shall pray for your good fortune, all the time you are absent."

"I shall endeavor to meet success," replied the captain, very complacently. "I will now seek my quarters, for before dawn I intend to be in my saddle. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied the old man.

Captain Minon turned to leave the apartment, and reached the door, when his eyes caught sight of a vision that caused him to turn pale and stagger to a seat!

"Jesu! what is the matter?" exclaimed Don Ferdinand, arising from his chair and approaching his friend. "Are you ill, Captain Minon? You look like a corpse."

"Well he may!" exclaimed the Donna Isabella, advancing into the room and confronting both the captain and her uncle. "Well may the villain look like a corpse."

"Holy Maria," ejaculated Don Ferdinand, elevating his hands and eyes toward heaven. "Can it be Isabella, or is it her spirit returned from the grave?"

"It is no spirit!" replied Isabella, regarding the captain with a look that made his heart tremble. "I am no spirit, but am flesh and blood, returned from the prison, to which that villain had assigned me!"

"Hush! Hush!" cried Don Ferdinand. "You are beside yourself, and wronging the most determined friend you have. Even now he was planning for your recovery."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the girl, with a tone of irony, that smote more keenly upon the confounded captain's heart, than would the keenest blade in his troops. "He plan for my recovery? That is most excellent. His friend, Don Francisco Morales, in whose Rancho I have been confined, would have assisted him in his search. So would his lieutenant, Don Jose Velasquez, by whom I was assailed, and dragged into captivity!"

"May the saints be merciful! But the poor girl has lost her reason. It grieves me to hear the girl rave."

This was a most excellent hint for Captain Minon. With a desperate effort, he regained his feet, and turning to Don Ferdinand, to avoid the indignant gaze of Isabella, he said:

"It is evident that the poor girl's mind is unsettled; but let us rejoice that she has returned. If she is at once consigned to the servants, she will undoubtedly recover. Care and nursing is all that she requires. You had better call the servants."

"Wretch!" exclaimed Isabella; but she was so excited that she could proceed no further.

Don Ferdinand, confident that his friend was correct in his conclusion, immediately called a servant. When the woman entered the room, she was so much surprised to see her mistress, whom she supposed to be dead, that she uttered a scream, and ran bawling through the Rancho!

"The mistress has returned! The mistress is here!"

Of course the intelligence aroused the drowsy domestics, and they flocked to the door of the old man's apartment in scores. Isabella was soon surrounded and almost mothered with caresses. The old man endeavored in vain to silence the din, but at length the maiden retreated to her apartment, and Don Ferdinand and the captain were left all alone.

"Alas! alas!" cried the old man, looking imploringly at his friend. "This accursed adventure has overturned the girl's reason!"

"She will recover, undoubtedly," replied the captain. "The villains who carried her off, have filled her mind with all kinds of lies. It will take some time to disabuse her, but time will do it. Permit me to offer you my hearty congratulations upon her return. I must away to my quarters, for I have much to do this morning."

"I thank you, my excellent friend," replied Don Ferdinand, "and shall always hold your kindness evinced to me, under this calamity, in the most grateful remembrance."

When Captain Minon was beyond the Rancho, and was pursuing his way toward the village, he fairly ground his teeth with rage. He could not restrain his terrible temper, and he beat his horse, and cursed and swore most unmercifully.

Here was an end to all his plans! Here was a final extinguishment of all the hopes he had cherished, with regard to the Donna Isabella. She had escaped from his clutches, and not only that, but she evidently knew by whose agency she had been abducted.

What cursed fatality had interfered to thwart his plans, and release her! Had Morales

proved false? At all hazards, he swore a most terrible vengeance on the robber, and all who were in any way implicated in the maiden's escape.

He galloped furiously to the door of his house, and dismounted. When the servant took his horse, he said:

"Send Velasquez to me at once! Tell him not to delay a moment. My business is important."

"There is a stranger awaiting you, in the sitting-room. He has been here some time."

"A stranger! Who is he?"

"I do not know. He says his business is with you, and cannot be deferred. He therefore waited for you."

"Well, proceed. Do not forget to send up Velasquez. Stranger or no stranger, I must consult with my lieutenant."

The servant departed with the horse, and wondering who the stranger could be, Minon entered the house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RENEGADE—THE DISCLOSURE—THE BETRAYAL.

WE are loth to look upon a picture of moral turpitude, and we are also loth to come in contact with characters destitute of honor and patriotism, whom we justly regard as blot upon the history of the human character. Yet, we cannot avoid it, at all times; and by circumstances we are often compelled to give them an importance that we detest.

We are now obliged to introduce a character, whose existence we would gladly pass over; but, as we profess to give a true history of the matters under consideration we may not do so.

When Bob Fanchette became attached to the Army of Occupation, in the character of a guide, he had a companion, with whom he had been on terms of intimacy for years. He was naturally of a wild and rough disposition, possessing a species of desperate courage, and delighting in adventures of the most dangerous description. Bob knew nothing of his honor, for he had never been placed in a situation to test it. By dint of perseverance, and the influence of some friends, the young man also obtained a situation in a corps of Pioneers.

His name was Frank Ardincourt.

After they entered upon their new duties, the companions became separated, and seldom saw each other.

In a little time, Ardincourt was missing. For some cause or other, he deserted, and nothing was definitely known concerning his whereabouts. He had been intrusted with quite a large sum of money by his commanding officer, and this, it was ascertained, he had appropriated to his own use. At length a rumor reached the camp, and it bore the stamp of probability upon its face, that Ardincourt had united his fortunes with a band of robbers, who committed their outrages in the province of New Leon, and the surrounding country.

This report gave Fanchette great pain, and he sincerely regretted the course his companion had been led to pursue. By and by he forgot his fall, and in fact, his existence, so deeply was he engaged in the duties of his vocation.

We left the Guide, and Donna Isabella, sitting by the banks of the river, near the entrance of a dark defile. The young girl was faint and weary from her unusual exertions, and the young man was endeavoring to revive her spirits, which were somewhat depressed.

"Cheer up!" said he. "We can devote a little time to repose, and then we can again pursue our way. We have already accomplished several miles of our journey."

"I am not despondent," she replied. "I feel that my strength will support me, for with you I can endure anything."

The peculiar accent of this simple sentence would have repaid this young man for any toil or danger.

For more than an hour they sat upon the fragrant green grass, beside the laughing river. Gazing upon the peculiar beauty of his companion, watching the ever-varying expression of her matchless features, he paid no heed to the flight of time, and felt that he could remain forever in that lovely spot, in her company.

While he was drinking deep of the cup of enjoyment, so temptingly offered, another was watching his movements with mingled feelings of wonder, regret, and satisfaction.

This watcher was Frank Ardincourt.

This young man was one of Morales's band,

and was on his return to the Rancho of the villain, when he accidentally discovered his old friend and his fair companion. His companions were hidden in the ravine, enjoying a sleep, after a night of more than usual toil.

At the first view, the robber did not recognize his friend. He supposed him to be some young peasant, and was about to accost him to excite his fears, when he changed his position, and thus brought his features to view.

An exclamation of surprise had nearly escaped him as he remembered the features of his old friend. The remembrance of other days, of days of innocence and happiness, affected him powerfully, and as a hot and scalding tear escaped from his eye, he felt a longing to embrace him. A moment's reflection changed the tenor of his thoughts.

"It will not do!" he muttered. "He would spurn me from his presence. I know Bob Fanchette. It cannot be otherwise, than that he has heard of my crimes!"

And the remembrance of his fall - of his dishonor - of his utter unworthiness, filled his soul with dark and bitter thoughts. He felt the burning blush, that even in the solitude of that dark ravine, tinged his embrowned cheek.

"What can lead him into this region?" he asked himself. "It cannot be that he has followed that girl beside him, into the heart of an enemy's country, and so far from his friends. No, no, he would never do that, even if he loved her to distraction. I would wager my head that he has some special mission. God! would not his head bring a price in that case!"

How easily sin extinguishes every good feeling in a vile heart! How soon the heart itself rebels against a noble inmate. A moment ago, Frank Ardincourt felt a keen remorse for his fallen condition. Now he entertained the idea of selling his friend, an act that would damn his memory forever.

At length Fanchette and companion moved on up the valley. With the utmost care he supported her form with his arm; and she leaned upon him, with that easy confidence that love so soon teaches. The robber watched them until they were lost to view, and then returned to his comrades, with an hundred devils at work in his heart.

Isabella and the Guide pursued their journey until the sun descended behind the hills; then they sought the shelter of a thicket, as the maiden was unable to proceed any further. They were but a few miles from Don Ferdinand's Rancho, and Fanchette felt an anxiety to get on, for fear Morales and Gonzalvo would liberate themselves and pursue them. But Isabella was unequal to the fatigue, and he was forced to stop.

How would his anxiety have been increased, if he had known that his old friend had discovered him, and was pondering upon some scheme to turn his knowledge of his character to some account!

They were utterly destitute of any kind of refreshment. The Guide in the excitement of his escape had neglected to provide himself even with the black bread and eggs the Rancho afforded, and he now felt that even THAT would have been acceptable. Isabella did not murmur at her deprivation, but leaning her head upon the Guide's shoulder, she soon slumbered as sweetly as if she had been in her boudoir, within the stout old walls of her uncle's Rancho. All night long, Fanchette sat and supported her, shielding her fair form from the winds and dews as well as circumstances would permit, and never once wearying of his lonely watch.

With the rise of the sun, they pursued their way. The long rest she had enjoyed, had completely relieved Isabella's weariness, and she walked briskly forward. In a few hours, the tall chimneys of the old Rancho were in sight, and once more they halted, to determine how to proceed.

Then, for the first time during all the journey, Fanchette reflected that they must part. The duty that had called him to this distant region could not be put off. Honor demanded that he should perform it, and that too, with the utmost diligence. To visit the home of the fair girl beside him, however much it might gratify his feelings, would be to place himself in the way of a new danger.

The Mexicans were his enemies!

And yet that he loved the Mexican maid his heart acknowledged by its heaviness at thought of parting.

"Isabella, here we must part," he at length said. "I am called by duty away to fields of

action which you will be pained to know of. I—"

He paused. The expression of sadness and pain on her face alarmed him.

"Ah, sir, have you deceived me—are you not a Frenchman in the Mexican service?"

"No, Donna; I have deceived you and others. I now confide the truth to you, knowing that you will not betray me."

"Never—never! Oh, señor, why undeceive me?"

That look—those words—told him all: he was beloved! He gave her one look in return, then clasped her in his arms! The story stood confessed; and there, in that sweet spot, it was told in all the fullness of hearts that loved even to the death. The spy confessed all, that Donna Isabella might labor under no error. She wept, but gave him her lips to kiss in token of her unchanging affection.

For a long time she was a prey to contending emotions. She felt for the situation of the young man, and endeavored to consider her duty in her promises, but what could duty do with the passions of that young girl. Her love—her all-absorbing love for the Guide, overpowered every feeling, love of home, love of friends, and the love of country. The idea of parting was too painful to be entertained for a moment. She turned to the Guide, and said:

"We need not be parted. You can do your duty, return to the Rio Grande, then decline following the war further. At all events, you cannot proceed now, until you have had both rest and refreshment. These I can provide for you in a safe place, where you will not be discovered. When you are through with the war, there will be no bar to our perfect happiness."

"But we shall be many miles apart, and your countrymen would not permit my presence here."

"But I myself will go with you to the Rio Grande! For you I will relinquish all, home, friends, and life!"

"But in the long and fatiguing march, amidst innumerable enemies and obstacles, you cannot accompany me. Your tender frame cannot endure the fatigues."

"Say not so! say not so!" said the maiden, impetuously. "You do not know me. By your side, I shall not know fatigue. In your society I shall not fear a foe."

The Guide was silent. Not that the maiden had convinced him that her plan was possible, but because he could not bring himself to pain her heart, by a refusal of her offer. One idea that she had suggested, he acknowledged was correct, and he was weighing in his mind the possibilities of carrying it out.

It was impossible for him to proceed further, without rest and refreshment. His frame, stout as it was, and so inured to hardship, needed recruiting, and he felt that this was the only opportunity that would present itself. It would also give him time to dispose of the matter of his love.

"You mentioned that you could secrete me, where I could repose before resuming my journey?"

"I did."

"Where?"

"Just above us in a dark valley, through which a little stream finds its way to the river. On the banks of that stream is a hut, formerly occupied by a peasant, but now tenantless. No one visits it but myself. In the hut is a private room, that would defy the scrutiny of the keenest eye. Report says it was built by a robber, many years ago. In that room you can remain in perfect security, as long as you choose, and I will take care that you do not want for food."

"But would not your visits be suspected?"

"No. It is always a favorite place of mine."

"But since your abduction your uncle may object to your going out alone."

"I will manage that. Only promise that you will go to the hut, and remain there."

"But I can remain but a day or two at furthest. Then I must pursue my way."

"Well, for a day or two, then. Of course you shall be at liberty to go when you choose."

"I will accompany you, then," said the Guide.

The Spanish maiden was rejoiced. She should not yet be separated from her lover. The day or two would also give her time to prepare for her departure, for she was determined to proceed with him, let the road be ever so perilous.

They proceeded to the old hut. The Guide was compelled to acknowledge that it was a

most easy retreat, and he hailed the protection that it afforded with infinite delight.

For a long time the lovers sat and conversed after they arrived at the hut. In the delight of love they forgot sorrow and pain, or that they were surrounded with almost innumerable difficulties. They only thought of the happiness they experienced, and of the rich store of enjoyment that had so suddenly opened upon them.

At length the night approached, and warned the lovers that their interview must close. After many adieux, Isabella tore herself away, and, with a lingering and unwilling step, moved toward the Rancho. Often did she stop and resolve to return to the hut, but the remembrance of the toil and privation the Guide had endured for her sake induced her to proceed, in order that she might procure him refreshments.

The gates of the court-yard were opened when she arrived, and she entered without being observed by the servants. Discovering a light in her uncle's room, she made her way toward it, when she confronted Captain Minon, in the manner we have described.

After the tumult and surprise consequent upon her discovery had subsided, and the perplexed maiden had taken possession of her own room, refreshments were provided her and she was left to quiet. She managed to conceal a portion of the provisions that had been provided for her, and then she impatiently awaited for the retiring of the household, in order that she might steal forth and convey them to the old hut to her lover.

The Guide had watched her retiring form as long as it could be seen, when she left for the Rancho. A feeling of desponding crept over him as she disappeared, and he was about to re-enter his now lonely room, when he fancied that he detected the sound of a horse's feet in the river valley. The noise passed away, however, and he concluded that his senses had deceived him.

He was right in his first impression. It was the friend of his youth, the companion of many happy days and weary nights, hastening to San Juan to sell his blood for gold!

In vain did Isabella watch for an opportunity of escaping from the Rancho unseen. Her arrival had caused such an excitement that the servants were not disposed to retire. Then the mysterious language she used toward Captain Minon must needs be discussed, and all were anxious to ascertain its purport.

Could it be possible that he, who was seemingly so active in the search, and who had been heard to vow such a terrible vengeance against the robbers, was cognizant of her capture, and even assisted in it? They did not believe Don Ferdinand's assertion that their mistress was crazy, and they accordingly gave credence to her positive assertions.

Overcome with fatigue and anxiety, the maiden fell asleep in her arm-chair, and did not awake until a servant entered the room in the morning. Then she aroused herself, uttered a reproach for her neglect, seized her little bundle of provisions, added more to it, and, making an excuse for her absence, hastened toward the hut that contained the dearest treasure of her heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRICE OF BLOOD—THE DENOUNCEMENT—THE FUGITIVE—THE NIGHT.

FRANK ADINCOURT, after he had witnessed the departure of the Guide and Isabella, returned to his comrades and awakened them. He made no mention of his discovery, but persuaded them to mount their animals, and proceeded toward the Rancho of Don Francisco Morales, from which they had been absent several days beyond the appointed time.

The bandits obeyed him, for his reckless courage had made him their leader, when they were out upon excursions. They mounted their horses, and at a slow and leisure pace proceeded toward their home.

The gates of the Rancho were open, and no one was in attendance when they arrived. This was an extraordinary circumstance, and altogether unusual. The greatest watchfulness and caution was characteristic of Don Francisco Morales.

The bandits rode into the court-yard and secured their horses. They then entered the house, but it seemed as silent and deserted as a desert. The robbers stared at each other in surprise.

"What can this mean?" they asked.

The lower rooms were ransacked, but no one was discovered. At length they heard a terrible thumping and outcry up-stairs, and thither they rushed confoundedly.

"Open this door! let me out at once," cried Don Francisco, who had witnessed the arrival of his troops from the little window. "Do not stand for the key, but open it at once."

And the old villain thrashed and stormed most furiously.

Frank Adincourt was the first to reach the door. He shoved back the bolt and threw it open, when out rushed Don Francisco, exclaiming while he foamed with rage:

"Pursue them! Pursue them, I say! If they escape, I am a ruined man! Mount and pursue them!"

The robbers were now more than ever surprised. They stared at each other in speechless wonder.

"By the Holy Cross! why don't you obey me?" thundered Don Francisco, stamping his foot upon the floor, and clinching his fists. "Do you dare refuse me?"

He was only answered by a wondering stare.

"By all the saints! I'll put you to the bastinado! Why don't you follow the fugitives?"

"You forget, Don Francisco," said Frank Adincourt, recovering from his surprise, "that we have been absent, and do not know what has occurred. You must explain yourself before we shall know how to act. Then we will obey you!"

"Have they not escaped? Can you not discern that they have gone, after having locked me and Gonzalvo in that room?"

"Who has gone?" asked Frank.

"La Ronge, and the maiden, the Donna Isabella. Now will you pursue them?"

"La Ronge?" asked one of the robbers, "who the devil is La Ronge?"

"Why, the accursed Frenchman!" replied Don Francisco.

Frank saw through the whole at once. La Ronge and Bob Fanchette were the same person. The Donna Isabella must be the female he saw in his company.

"You had better tell us all about it," said Frank, "and then we can determine how to proceed. At present it would be only a wild-goose chase. Compose yourself and tell us the whole story."

Now that he was freed from duress, Don Francisco began to recover his temper somewhat. He finally re-entered the room, and seating himself by the table, he narrated all that had transpired during the absence of the gang. He concluded with a most dolorous accent, and said:

"If the girl escapes, we are destroyed, for Minon will be enraged and turn the military against us."

"Frank Adincourt was for a moment lost in thought. At length he said:

"From your description, I know this La Ronge. If he is the person I suspect, present pursuit would be useless, for he is keen and wary. If you will trust the matter in my hands, I will pledge my life to appease the wrath of Captain Minon, and also make a rich affair for ourselves out of this matter."

"Huzzah for the Señor Adincourt," shouted the bandits.

"Are you confident in your assertions?" asked Don Francisco, with great interest.

"If I do not succeed I repeat, that I will forfeit my life," said Frank.

"In your hands it is then!" said Morales, and his mind seemed relieved of a great load.

"Now let's have some refreshment," he said.

"A life in the woods is a great promoter of appetite. You, Gonzalvo! come out of that corner, and attend to my horse. Feed him well, and rub his limbs, for this night I must away to San Juan."

Down the stair-case the ruffians rushed, attended by Don Francisco. A meal of coarse food was hastily prepared for them, and after it had been devoured, they proceeded to sum up the gains of their excursion to the mountains.

Gonzalvo followed Frank's instructions in regard to his horse. The animal was fed and rubbed, and just as the sun was setting, was brought to the door of the house, caparisoned for a journey. The renegade vaulted into the saddle, and applying the spurs, dashed out of the yard and up the valley at full speed, but the moment he was out of sight of the Rancho, he slackened his speed to a walk, and then peered about him with the greatest caution, in the hopes of detecting the fugitives.

All that night and the next day, he spent in a vain endeavor to trace the fugitives. He scoured the ravines, he examined the thickets, and the little dells, but he missed them. Indeed, had he pursued the straightforward path he would have overtaken them.

"They cannot elude me!" he exclaimed. "Before he can leave the country I will rouse him out."

So the villain put his horse to the gallop, and dashed into the village of San Juan. He left his horse at a little cabaret, and then proceeded to the quarters of Captain Minon.

He was waiting the arrival of the commander of the lancers, when that latter individual entered the sitting-room.

He arose when the captain entered, and greeted him with a very formal bow. He observed a very dark and forbidding frown upon the captain's brow, but this did not disconcert him, and he said:

"This is Captain Minon, I believe?"

"That's my name. I am told you have been waiting for me."

"Yes. I arrived some time ago, and having business of importance, that could not be transacted with a servant, I chose to tarry until your return. I hope I have given no offense."

"Not at all."

"You do not recognize me."

"I do not."

"I come from Don Francisco Morales."

The captain's brow was darker than the thunder-cloud. He gazed steadily at the unblenching robber.

"Then you are one of Morales's men?"

"I am."

"Perhaps you can tell me then, what your master means by turning my prisoners loose?"

"Don Francisco has nothing to do with it, I assure you."

"How came they at large, then?"

"They liberated themselves."

"Indeed! Is not your Rancho strong enough to hold a young girl of nineteen?"

"But the other prisoner assisted her."

"The other prisoner! WHAT other prisoner?"

"Senor La Ronge."

"Senor the devil!" exclaimed the captain furiously. "I, myself, liberated him, and set him upon his way!"

Adincourt knew not of this, but, sure of his game, proceeded in a cautious manner to develop to the captain his knowledge both of the identity of the spy, and of the relations which existed between Isabella and the American. His object being to wrest from the Mexican a large sum, the cunning rogue first excited the captain's anger to a white heat, by telling of the love confession which he had overheard, then by volunteering to betray the spy's place of concealment, he succeeded in extorting the sworn promise of large reward.

All was at length arranged between the two scoundrels. Frank was to return to the little inn, where he was to tarry for the night, to return in the morning, and co-operate with the captain in the spy's arrest and in Isabella's complicity in his escape. This complicity proven would place her wholly in his power, and render even her father's influence powerless to save her. Her only escape would be through her marriage with the officer! He smiled his satisfaction over the fates which had so favored him!

The lieutenant departed, and the captain retired to bed. It was a long time before he could compose himself to sleep, his mind was so busily engaged upon the information furnished by the renegade.

Before the captain had concluded his breakfast, the robber was in his sitting-room. He awaited the arrival of the captain with the greatest impatience, and as soon as that worthy made his appearance he said:—

"If we wish to secure the spy, we had best be moving. He may retreat beyond our reach."

"You are positive he was with Isabella?"

"Of course I am. He left the Rancho with her."

"That's right. Wait one moment. Here comes Velasquez, my excellent lieutenant."

Velasquez entered the room, and gazed at the robber.

"Ask me no questions," said Minon, "but at once parade the men in front of the plaza. You, sir," said he, turning to Frank, "prepare your horse at once, and meet me here."

These orders were at once complied with. The lancers made a most imposing display up-

on the plaza, where they were soon joined by the captain and Frank Adincourt.

"Follow me!" cried Minon, placing himself at the head of the detachment, and galloped toward the Rancho of Don Ferdinand Xera.

The troops readily followed their leader, though all of them, and none more than Jose Velasquez, wondered what could be the business of the day. When they arrived at the Rancho they were ordered to halt, while Minon and the renegade entered the courtyard.

Don Ferdinand had witnessed the approach of the lancers with the greatest surprise. He asked himself what it could mean. "Was his friend, the captain, about to attack the Rancho?"

The old man had left his house, and was standing in the court when the captain and the robber entered. They dismounted from their horses, and approached the old man.

"Good-morning, Don Ferdinand. I have a little business with you. Shall we walk into your room?"

"Certainly," said the old man, and he led the way to the room.

Minon and Frank Adincourt followed him. The old man seated himself in a chair, and asked:

"What is your errand captain; it must be an important one, to require this array of your troops!"

"It is an important one, Don Ferdinand," replied the captain. "It is a very important one. Where is your niece, Isabella?"

"She is in her room undoubtedly. I have not seen her stir as yet. Do you require her presence?"

"I do."

"Then I will call her."

And the old man entered the apartment of the domestics, and ordered them to send the Donna Isabella to his room at once. He then returned to the room.

A servant announced that Donna Isabella had arisen, and left the Rancho for a walk.

"We will be obliged to await her return, gentlemen," said the old man turning to his visitors. "She will undoubtedly be back in a short time."

Minon and the renegade exchanged knowing glances.

"The business is very painful, very painful, indeed," said Captain Minon, "and I wish it had fallen to the lot of another person than me to attend to it."

"Speak out, man!" exclaimed Don Ferdinand, somewhat testily. "You need not be ashamed of your duty. What is the business about which you make so much ado?"

"The Donna Isabella, your niece, is in league with the enemies of her country!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"What I say," replied the captain. "She is in league with a spy from the American camp, whom I have come here to arrest."

"It is FALSE!" exclaimed the old man, his Castilian blood boiling with rage. "Do you mean to insult me, by stating that any one of my blood would league with the foes of Mexico? Old as I am, by the Holy Cross, I would resent the insult at once!"

"Compose yourself, Don Ferdinand!" exclaimed the captain, somewhat ashamed by this exhibition of the old man's ire. "No insult is intended you. We all know you to be a firm and constant patriot, and that is what makes this announcement the more painful to me. Unfortunately for the Donna Isabella, the proof is so positive that I can't doubt it. She may be deceived herself, but this young man saw her the other day in company with a spy from the American camp, and like a good citizen he has informed me of it."

"I presume if we trace her now that she will be found in the villain's company," added Frank Adincourt, in a calm, firm tone.

"You are at liberty to follow her," said Don Ferdinand, turning fiercely toward Frank.

"Let us go, captain," added the renegade, and they left the old man's room and walked out of the court-yard.

Don Ferdinand did not follow them. Although greatly mollified by the complimentary manner in which Minon had spoken of him, his wrath had not entirely cooled, and he paced his room with an excited step.

The captain held a whispered conversation with Velasquez, and then accompanied by Frank, he walked down the valley in the direction that Isabella had taken, as a servant had informed him.

"He undoubtedly accompanied her home," said Frank, as they pursued a little path that led along the bank of the river, "and knowing his character of course she could not introduce him into the dwelling of her uncle. He is in some place of concealment near at hand, I will wager my head."

At length they came to the little ravine in which the hut was situated. They halted for a moment at the mouth of the little stream, and then Frank said:

"Let us follow this gorge."

Minon consented, and after they had proceeded a few rods they came in sight of the hut. Before the door, seated upon a mossy stone, was Fanchette and the lovely Isabella! One of his stout arms supported her slender waist, and with all the trustiness of warm and confiding affection, her fair head reposed upon his shoulder.

Minon stood like one petrified. This sight, above all others, was gall and wormwood to his soul! There was the being that he blindly loved, and had been refused, lavishing her affections upon another—and that other his country's enemy!

At length Isabella looked up, aroused by some word of tenderness that the Guide uttered, and her eye caught the figure of Captain Minon and the robber.

With a scream of terror she clasped her arms tightly around Fanchette's neck, as if she would shield him from harm, and buried her face in the folds of his frock.

"What is the matter?" he asked, in a soothing tone. "What caused that scream, dearest?"

"We are lost! We are lost!" was all that she could utter.

The Guide cast his eyes about him, and he, too, caught sight of Adincourt and the captain. He did not recognize his old companion, nor even the captain, yet he saw by the dress of the latter that he was a Mexican officer of Lancers.

"This love has been my ruin," thought the young man, but even then he would not have relinquished the intoxicating passion.

Supporting the form of his mistress he arose to his feet. Then he drew forth a pistol, resolved to die rather than to submit to a captivity he knew full well would be the harbinger of death. Isabella saw the movement, and divining his object, she said:

"Oh! fly! fly! you cannot resist. The officer is Captain Minon, and you may be sure his Lancers are close at hand!"

"I cannot fly!" said the Guide. "Better die where I am, than fall in a mean attempt to elude my fate. Leave me, Isabella! You they will not dare to injure."

"Leave you? Never! YOUR fate is MINE, let it be good or bad. And the true-hearted girl embraced him more closely.

Adincourt and the captain had not been idle in the meantime. The renegade had approached near the spot upon which the Guide was standing. The captain had retreated to the foot of the gorge, and was giving utterance to a succession of yells to attract the attention of Velasquez and his troop.

Again the Guide turned toward his enemies and the old friends gazed in each other's faces.

"Bob," said the renegade, in a tone of affected familiarity. "Surrender to me and I will protect you from harm."

The Guide recognized the voice.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, speaking in English. "Is it you, Frank Adincourt, asking for the surrender of your countryman? Better come to his side and assist him."

"It is useless to resist, Bob," persisted the robber. "No good can result from it. If you will surrender, I will stand by you to the last. I will, upon my honor!"

"One that will desert the standard of his native land, and take up arms for the foe, will not hesitate to betray his friend!" exclaimed the Guide, scornfully.

This speech stung the renegade to the quick. His brow flushed with passion, and he said:

"Fool! you had better be persuaded. By your resistance you only secure certain death. A troop of lancers are close at hand, for even now I hear their galloping toward us."

This was true. Minon had made himself heard, and, in accordance with an arrangement previously made, Don Jose and his men were riding down to the place from whence the sounds emanated.

The valorous captain himself, seeing the rapid advance of his men, drew his saber in a

threatening manner and approached the hut. Isabella fainted upon witnessing his approach, and sank slowly upon the grass beside her lover.

"In the name of the Mexican Republic, I summon you to surrender," shouted Captain Minon.

The Guide paid no attention to the summons, though just at this moment the long line of Lancers came in sight, galloping up the narrow gorge.

"Surrender, I say! Or I will order my men to charge upon you in an instant!"

"Oh! surrender, Bob," cried Adincourt, imploringly. "It is folly to sacrifice life so."

"Never! by the eternal!" cried the Guide, the fierce blood driving through his heart, and nerving his arm.

With one stride he stood over the prostrate form of his mistress, and cocking his pistol he prepared for the hopeless encounter.

"Ride him down!" cried Minon, to his advancing troop.

"HELL-HOUND! Would you trample upon the innocent?" cried the Guide, pointing to the prostrate form of Isabella.

"RIDE HIM DOWN!" repeated Minon, and Don Jose Velasquez, unsheathing his sword, shouted:

"Charge!"

On sped the cavalry! In an instant the sharp report startled the echoes of the ravine, then another, and another, and then riderless steeds wheeled from the ranks and ran toward the river!

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRISONER—THE RANCHO—THE ASTONISHMENT—THE DUNGEON.

THE unexpected resistance of the Guide, and the fate of the file leaders struck a terror into the hearts of the lancers. They reined in their steeds, looked with terror upon their fallen comrades and refused to proceed further.

Striding the prostrate form of the maiden with his pistol pointed at the foe, the Guide glanced upon the captain. This latter worthy was astonished at the young man's temerity, and he was completely bewildered. Don Jose, his lieutenant, had fallen at the first discharge from the Guide's pistol, and the mounted horses were absolutely without a leader.

The renegade, in the meantime, intent upon the reward that had been offered him, had not been idle. While the attention of Fanchette was bestowed upon Minon, he crept behind him unobserved and caught him round the arms. The pistol fell to the ground in the scuffle that ensued, and for all immediate purposes the Guide was unarmed. Other weapons were in the belt, under his frock, but he could not draw them forth.

"Surrender to me, Bob!" said the renegade. "I tell you again that it is the only way to preserve your life. Positively, I declare that I will not desert you."

"I cannot confide in you," said the Guide, and he resumed his struggles to free his arms.

The Mexicans witnessed this struggle. They saw that Fanchette was unarmed, and their courage suddenly rose. One or two of them dismounted, and with Captain Minon hastened to the assistance of the robber.

With the assistance of these men Adincourt succeeded in securing his prisoner, but not without a most desperate struggle. He experienced the satisfaction, however, of seeing his friend prostrate upon the earth, his hands secured with strong cord. For the credit of human nature it must be said that it was not without a tinge of remorse that he witnessed the consummation of his treachery.

During the struggle, and indeed, since she had fainted to the earth, the Donna Isabella had remained insensible. Now that the prisoner was secured and there was nothing to fear from him, Captain Minon turned his attention to her.

"We must assist the girl," said he. "She must be removed to the Rancho, as soon as possible."

Frank approached her and stooped over her prostrate form. He was proceeding to unloosen her dress when her eyes opened, and a short and tremulous respiration commenced.

"Where is her?" she asked, endeavoring to raise herself from the earth. "Is he safe?"

"Perfectly safe!" replied Frank. "Give yourself no uneasiness about him, but make haste to arise and proceed homeward. This is no place for you."

The poor girl attempted to arise, but it was impossible. She was too weak. Minon saw her efforts, and said:

"Dismount, some more of you, and bear the Donna Isabella to her uncle's house."

Several of the men dismounted, and, more dead than alive, the suffering girl was borne to her home.

"How are we to remove the prisoner?" asked Minon, as the escort of the maiden disappeared from his view.

"I'll answer for his appearance," said the renegade, and he approached his captive comrade.

"Come Bob!" said he, "we must be moving. We have but a little distance to go. Will you ride, or will you walk?"

"It matters not which, I suppose," said the Guide; "undoubtedly my fate will be the same!"

"Don't despair," said Frank. "Your case is not as hopeless as you think for. Take courage."

The Guide turned upon him a look of ineffable contempt, and answered him:

"Do not mock me, with your feigned sympathy. I had much rather regard you as the traitor that you are and defy your power, than for one moment permit these associates of yours to think that my sufferings can be aught to you!"

"At least," said Adincourt, not attempting to conceal the burning blush that suffused his cheek, "let me assist you to arise."

The Guide made no reply, and the renegade assisted him to his feet. He strode at once to Minon, and said:

"I suppose I am YOUR prisoner!"

"You are."

"Well, then, lead on. I will follow you."

Minon's first object was to convince Don Ferdinand of the guilt of his niece. For this purpose he resolved to conduct his prisoner to the Rancho, in the first place, and remove him afterward to the dungeon of San Juan. Not daring to trust him on horseback, for fear he should escape, he detailed a guard to walk beside him, with drawn sabers, and leaving the remainder of his troop to take care of their fallen comrades, he himself led the way out of the gorge.

With a bold and firm step, Fanchette followed his captors. When they emerged from the ravine into the broader valley of the river, the Rancho was in sight, and it was apparent to all that it was the scene of a great commotion.

The servants were running to and fro, the women wringing their hands and uttering lamentations, and the men with solemn and dejected countenances. They were utterly at a loss to conjecture what would next occur to disturb the peace of their quiet abode, and fancied that the evil demons had been let loose, to afflict their master and their beloved young mistress.

"Come on, men!" cried Minon, quickening his pace, when the Rancho came into view. "We must be more active, for we have much to perform before night."

The men walked faster, and soon entered the court-yard. The servants informed the captain that Don Ferdinand was in his own apartment, and thither the prisoner was conveyed. The old man was pacing his yard with an impatient step, after the departure of Minon's cavalry for the gorge, when the servants announced to him, that a detachment of the lancers, on foot, and bearing in their arms the person of a female, was approaching. Filled with alarm, he hurried out of the gate, and hastened down the valley to meet them. He had not proceeded far, before he discovered that the female was the Donna Isabella!

"Santa Maria!" cried the old man, "what has occurred to the dear girl? Has Minon or any of his ruffians DARED to be rude to her? And the old man's eye again flashed with the fire of passion. "If HE has dared," he muttered between his closed teeth, "he shall rue the day though he were twice my favorite."

The old man approached the lancers.

"What has occurred? What ails the girl?" he asked.

"There was a little skirmish up the glen," answered one of the soldiers, "and the fighting terrified her. She fainted, but has now quite recovered. By Captain Minon's orders, we are carrying her to her home."

"What fighting do you allude to?" asked Don Ferdinand.

"The spy, sir! We have taken the spy, but

he brought three of our best men to the ground before he surrendered."

"THE SPY!" said the old man, and a hollow groan escaped him. "Can it be possible that Minon's words were true?"

The soldiers knew not what to reply to this question, and they were silent. The old man accompanied them to the Rancho, saw that the maiden was conveyed to her own room, and then he ordered all the servants away and stood alone by her bedside.

"How is this, Isabella?" said he; "answer me truly. Minon was here this morning, and said you were in league with the enemies of your country—that you were concealing a spy in our midst. Is this TRUE, my girl?"

The maiden made no reply, but gazed languidly into the old man's face. Then she closed her eyes and appeared to be exhausted by the efforts she had made to understand him.

"Poor girl!" said the old man, "she is very weak, and I will not question her any more now. I will send a servant to her assistance, and pursue my inquiries by and by, when she is more recovered."

The old man left her, sent a servant to her assistance, and sought his own room, where he was when Captain Minon entered with his prisoner.

"I have now come to prove my words," said the captain, when himself, the renegade, the prisoner, and as many soldiers as could crowd into the room, stood before the astonished Don Ferdinand. "I have come to prove my words, and ask of you, as a true Mexican, that you assist me to sift this matter to the bottom. There is the spy to whom I alluded this morning."

"I know nothing about the man," said the old man, gazing with admiration at the proud figure of the Guide.

"I presume you do not," answered the captain, "but you shall hear. Tell what you know of this man," he added, turning to Frank Adincourt, and motioning him to take a position nearer the table. "Tell us what you know about this prisoner."

Frank Adincourt stepped forward to the position indicated by the captain. He knew that the keen and reproachful eyes of his old friend were upon him, and that there was most aggravated baseness in his conduct, yet he maintained as bold an air as he could, and in a firm tone, complied with Minon's command.

"I know the prisoner," he said, "his name is Robert Fanchette, and he is an American, belonging to the army now encamped upon the Rio Grande. What his business is, in this part of the country, I cannot tell."

"Where have you seen him lately, and in whose company?" asked Minon, anxious that the name of Isabella should be brought to the old man's notice.

"I saw him a day or two since, and for the last time on this side of the Rio Grande, a few miles down the San Juan. He was then in the society of the Donna Isabella Xera."

"Where did you next see him?" pursued Minon, without paying any heed to the dark frown that clouded the brow of Don Ferdinand, "tell us that!"

"I next saw him this morning," continued the robber, "in a little gorge a short distance below here, sitting in front of an old and dilapidated hut."

"Was any one with him?" asked Minon, with a pale cheek and flashing eye.

"One arm was about the waist of the Donna Isabella, and her head reclined upon his shoulder!"

"SILENCE!" thundered the old Mexican. "The Donna Isabella would not thus disgrace herself! I will not listen to the slander! The tale is false!"

"Pardon me," said Minon, "I must confirm the testimony of this man, I myself saw what he relates, though it grieves me to say it."

"Holy Father!" ejaculated the old man, covering his face with his hands.

"We have searched the person of the stranger," pursued the captain, "and although we found nothing upon his person, that particularly spoke of his errand, yet there is enough, taken into consideration with other circumstances, to warrant his condemnation as a spy. I call upon you, Don Ferdinand, to assist me."

"What assistance do you require of me?" asked the old man sharply. "Is not a whole company of lancers sufficient to take charge of one, and he securely bound?"

"I do not require your assistance in keeping

the prisoner in custody any more than I asked for it to secure him," replied Captain Minon. "You know that this is a grave matter, and one that requires experience and wisdom to decide upon. What ought to be done with the spy?"

"If he is a spy, the law condemns him to death," replied the old man; "that is clear enough."

"Have you any doubts as to his character?"

"Let me first hear his story," replied the Don.

"He can speak," said Minon. "Let us hear what he has to urge in his own favor."

All eyes were turned upon the Guide. For himself, he knew that all he could say would avail nothing, but he determined to clear the character of the Donna Isabella from the cloud that Adincourt had endeavored to throw over it, as far as his assertion would go. He therefore turned toward Don Ferdinand, as the one most likely to give him credence, and said:

"My own story is soon told. I am an American, that I do not seek to deny. What my business is, what has called me to this region of country, I leave it to the sagacity of my captor and his colleague to determine. I only wish to explain my connection with the Donna Isabella, which my traitorous countryman has endeavored most maliciously to falsify."

"Explain it, by all means," said Don Ferdinand. "You shall have a candid hearing."

And he thereupon proceeded to relate what had occurred—related all that was necessary for his purpose, particularly emphasizing the fact that Donna Isabella was abducted at the secret instigation and order of Captain Minon, as proved by a conversation overheard by himself between the plotters.

Don Ferdinand listened to the recital with ominous calmness, his countenance alternately flushing and paling, then turned fiercely to the captain, and said: "You have basely deceived me, and you shall answer for it!"

"Do you believe a spy! an American—one of the robbers of the Rio Grande?" demanded the captain of Don Ferdinand.

The old man made no answer, but turning to the prisoner said: "Go on."

"I have nothing further to say. I escorted her to her home, and she had been to supply me with provisions, when I was arrested. This is all the connection that exists between us, and I solemnly swear, that up to the hour in which we separated, she thought me to be an agent of the Mexican Government!"

Minon was enraged. This simple story, and he had no doubt of its truth, entirely exculpated the maiden from guilt. He felt that he had acted hastily, but it was too late to go back.

Don Ferdinand, after the conclusion of the Guide's narrative, turned to Minon and said:

"Let me see the man now, who will say that any of my house are leagued with the enemies of my country. I'll teach him more respect for his betters, let him be whom he may."

"Don Ferdinand will do well to remember that he has nothing but the word of a spy to depend upon," said the captain.

"And Captain Minon will do well to remember that he has nothing but the word of a traitor and a robber to depend upon," retorted the Guide, with a tone, and gesture of his manacled arms, that made the villain start.

"Forward! men, and remove the prisoner," said Minon, "this parleying amounts to nothing: see that he is conveyed in safety to San Juan, and consigned to the prison adjoining the Cathedral. If he escapes, you shall answer me with your lives!"

Don Ferdinand made no objection to this course, indeed he could not; according to the Guide's own confession, he was a foe to Mexico, and detected under suspicious circumstances. Yet he felt his sympathies warmly excited in favor of the noble-hearted youth. There was something so dignified, and gallant, in his bearing; something so manly in his countenance, that he heartily wished him beyond the reach of harm. He could scarcely restrain his tears when he left the room, and concealed his emotion by a strong effort.

With much exultation Fanchette was marched to San Juan. His perfect knowledge of the Spanish tongue made him aware of the jeers and insults that were pointed at him by the rabble, but he paid no heed to them, and maintained a firm and unswerving bearing. As they neared the village, the crowd increased, and when they were informed that the prisoner

was one of the northern barbarians then at war with the country, they rent the air with shouts and acclamations. Still the Guide was undismayed.

They reached the prison, which adjoined the Cathedral, on the main plaza or square. It was a low stone building, apparently but little used, and bearing about it the marks of decay and ruin. With much effort, its rusted door was opened, and a succession of long low corridors, with doors upon each side, met the Guide's gaze. Into a cell in one of the corridors he was thrust, and left to survey his new abode at his pleasure.

The internal appearance of the cell, more than sustained the cheerless impression that the outside of the old pile seemed to warrant. The cold, bare walls were covered with filth. The floors were broken, and filled with poisonous insects, and not a couch or a chair, not even a wisp of straw presented itself. A small, round hole, just under the ceiling, fortified with rusty iron bars, admitted the light of day.

The reflections of the Guide, for the first few hours after he became an inmate of this disgusting place, were not of a pleasurable description. He thought of his mission, his comrades on the bank of the Rio Grande, and for a moment he was upbraided by the thought, that had he not neglected his duty, and listened to the blandishments of love, he might have by this time been far on his way to Monterey. But he speedily drove out the thought as one unworthy of him, and endeavored to fortify himself for the fate that was in store for him.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAIDEN'S GRIEF—THE EXPLANATION—THE CONDEMNATION.

It was not until the day after her lover had been consigned to the dungeon of San Juan, that the Donna Isabella fully recovered her consciousness. The detection of the Guide had been so entirely unexpected and unlooked for, that it came upon her with a most crushing weight. The calamity was so great that it seemed to drown her mind in a pool of despair.

After her uncle had left her, and the servants hastened to her assistance, she fell into a deep and heavy slumber. It was not of that kind that rests and refreshes us, but it was of that fatiguing and painful description which ushers in a fearful sickness. Her dreams were frightful, and even in unconsciousness, she turned and tossed upon her bed, as if under the malign influence of some unseen demon. Throughout the whole day, she lay in this lethargic state.

Several times, after the departure of Minon and his prisoner, her uncle visited the room in which she was for the purpose of conversing with her, but the report of the servant deterred him from entering, and he returned to the usual duties of his Rancho. In spite of all his efforts his mind would continually dwell upon his niece and the young American, and he often caught himself asking—

"Can it be possible that the girl loves him? By the Cross! most well she may, for he is a most frank, noble looking youth, and I doubt me not well worthy the affections of any girl."

The Don was also troubled in another particular. He was a true Mexican, and, as in duty bound, he looked with the most intense hatred upon the foes of his country. Like most other men of his nation, he looked upon them as barbarians, and destitute of all the elevated traits of humanity. But this young man, this spy, as Minon called him, had won upon his sympathies most singularly. Could he tamely consent to sanction his execution? What course would he pursue if he became convinced that his niece's peace of mind depended upon the preservation of the young man's life?

That he would be condemned to death the old man well knew. That he should be called upon to sit at the trial, he also knew.

The following morning Isabella awoke, fully restored to the use of her faculties. Throughout the night she enjoyed a repose, refreshing in its nature, and different from the fitful stupor, that had oppressed her during the day. Her mind had recovered from the benumbing shock it had received, and she was enabled to reflect, reasonably if not calmly on the events that had transpired.

Alas! for the poor girl, her situation was not bettered by the change. From the servant who more particularly attended her, she learn-

ed the history of the arrest, and also that her lover was confined in the village.

We cannot describe the thrill of agony that pervaded her bosom, as her mind comprehended for the first time, the full extent of the young man's danger.

She upbraided herself for her conduct, for to that she attributed the Guide's misfortunes. She had prevailed upon him to linger in the dangerous neighborhood, she had secreted him in the old hut, and then, thoughtlessly and for the gratification of a desire to be in his presence, she had led his enemies upon him, and he was now pining in the loneliness and gloom of a foreign dungeon.

Would he not distrust her love?—would he not look upon her as a traitor who had lulled him in security by her seductive arts, and then turned him over to his foes? Would he not curse her for her ingratitude after he had periled life and freedom, to release her from the confinement of a villain.

Most acute was her mental agony. As her love for the Guide had been deep and all absorbing, so in proportion, was her misery at his calamity.

The Donna Isabella did not know the strength of her nature. At the first burst of grief, she fancied that she could not survive the storm. But she did not know the nature of the passion that had made her its victim. After a few hours of despondency and despair, the light broke in upon her troubled breast, and she forgot her sorrows—new thoughts were busy, new ideas presented themselves to her. The proud capabilities of a woman's heart, the almost superhuman resources of its love, began to develop themselves, and under their powerful and resistless influences she arose from her bed, and imperceptibly to herself assumed an air of firm, unyielding determination.

While her imagination was filled with plans and schemes for her lover's rescue, and she was perplexing herself with their arrangement, the door of her apartment opened and her uncle entered.

He seated himself beside her, and she cast a furtive glance at his face, to read there, if possible, the feelings of his heart. She was greatly surprised, when, instead of the frown she expected, she saw nothing but a smile of paternal tenderness, which she knew the old man would never lightly assume.

"Have you recovered from your indisposition?" he asked, in a kind and winning tone.

"I am nearly recovered," she replied, "and hope that a day of two of rest will complete the cure."

"I have come to converse with you a little while, upon some matters of importance. Can you endure the fatigue of the conversation, or shall I defer it?"

Isabella's heart beat rapidly, and she felt emotions of trepidation but she answered:

"It will not fatigue me, dear uncle, and I really wish you would converse with me now." The old man seemed pleased. "She does not dread the interview," he thought, "and that is another resistless evidence of her innocence of any criminality with the spy."

"You know," said he in a kind tone, "of the transactions of a few days past. Minon has arrested in your company, a man that he calls a spy. He has also endeavored to implicate you in the young man's guilt. Will you tell me TRULY, on the honor of a Mexican maiden the history of your connection with him?"

"I will," answered Isabella, firmly; and she resolved at once to make her uncle acquainted with all the facts of the case, and throw herself upon his mercy.

She then related the facts as they were. She detailed every thing that had transpired, from the moment she was seized by the disguised lancers, to the time of Fanchette's arrest. She did not attempt to conceal a single item, not even the little history of their love. The old man listened in silence, and when she had concluded, he said, as he brushed a tear from his eyelid.

"You cannot tell the joy you have given me, by the frank recital of your adventure. Where truth abides, there is also innocence. I have every reason to believe you have told me the truth, and your story corresponds with the narrative of the youth, as he detailed it in my presence after his arrest. It relieves my heart of a load."

"Then he told all?" asked Isabella, with a smile upon her features, the first that had nestled there for many an hour.

"He did. He told it too, for the purpose of clearing your character from the aspersions that Minon had cast upon it. He said you were in nowise responsible for, or a participant in his guilt, if he was guilty."

"How generous!"

"And you love him?"

"I do. I hope you will forgive me, dear uncle, but honor and truth compel me to say that I love him."

"And that too, after you know him to be a foe of Mexico, of your native land?"

Isabella hung down her head, and for a moment knew not what reply to make. At length she said:

"Uncle, I love him still. This is a war of NATIONS, not of individuals. It would be most unjust to charge the evils of these hostilities upon those who did not assist to bring them about, and who, in participating in them, are but performing a duty that cannot be avoided. I do not believe this young man harbors a revengeful spirit against Mexico, or a single individual within its limits."

"Yet, he has arrayed against us," said the old man.

"And we against him, without a particle of reason or interest upon either side. He is only pursuing a duty that every man owes to the Government under which he lives. If this was America, and he a Mexican, you would at once call him a brave young man, for periling his life to save his country."

"No man ever gained laurels by arguing with a woman in love," said the old man, who was compelled to acknowledge the justice of the maiden's remarks. "I regret your passion exceedingly, for it is doomed to a bitter disappointment!"

"Oh, say not so!" exclaimed Isabella, looking beseechingly into the face of her uncle. "He is so manly, so honorable, and so generous, that you cannot fail to be pleased with him."

"I speak not in regard to any of those things," replied the old man, hastily. "Isabella, I freely confess, that he is a most noble youth, and I wish that this, our own land, produced men like him."

"To what did you allude, then?"

"Alas! It grieves me to give you pain, but you must be prepared for the worst. This young man will assuredly be condemned to death. Minon will not let him escape."

"He must not be condemned to death! He shall not be condemned to death!" exclaimed Isabella, vehemently. "He has not been guilty of any crime deserving death, and Minon DARE not imbrue his hands in his noble and innocent blood!"

"You talk idle, Isabella," said the old man, solemnly. "Minon dares, and will order his execution. By the laws of ALL civilized nations, spies are condemned to death."

"But he is not a spy, urged the maiden. "But for me, but for my protection, he would never have visited this fatal place. I alone am the guilty one, and let Minon wreak his vengeance upon me. This young man is innocent."

"But how came he in the country at all? He was a prisoner to Don Francisco before you saw him. His countrymen are beyond the Rio Grande, and he is in our territory."

Isabella could not explain this. At length she remembered that the war was not yet declared by either power, and she asked:

"Are strangers who visit us in times of peace seized and condemned as spies?"

"No."

"Then this young man cannot be a spy. There is no war declared as yet, neither has blood been shed. He cannot, therefore, be adjudged a spy."

The old man was thoughtful for a moment. There was some ingenuity in the idea advanced by the maiden, for, although hostilities might be said to exist, there was no declaration from either side made public. He resolved to urge it, at the young man's trial, but he could not bring himself to hold out hopes to his niece that depended for fruition upon such slight argument. He shook his head doubtfully, and said:

"I fear that your reasoning will avail but little. A few days will determine his fate, and in the meantime I advise you to prepare yourself for the worst."

"But, uncle, you will sit at the trial, and you CAN and will intercede for him. Remember, but for ME, he would have been safe among his friends."

"I shall sit at his trial, and the young man shall have a fair hearing. Honor requires it. It would only discredit our republic, and injure our national character, to condemn him wrongfully, or upon trivial grounds. Yet I fear that Minon and his confederates will be able to show his guilt too clearly."

Isabella wept. She could not restrain her tears, and she felt a relief from their flow. The old gentleman saw that any endeavor to console her would be vain, and with a heavy heart he left the room. He could not upbraid her for her love.

As he was wending his way to his own room, his eye caught sight of a lancer's uniform in the court-yard. He changed his direction, and approaching the soldier, asked:

"Does your business here pertain to me?"

"It does, senor."

"Make it known then."

The soldier presented a note.

"You are requested, I believe, to sit as one of the judges in the case of the spy."

"When?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Very well. Tell your master I shall be there."

The lancer bowed and departed, and the old man entered his room. He tore open the note and read it. It was merely a request from Minon that he would be present at the trial, as he was one of the oldest inhabitants of the province.

"Yes, yes, both for the girl's sake and for the sake of justice I must attend," he muttered. "By the Virgin! I would give a thousand pieces of gold to save the stranger."

Yet the generous old man could not for one moment entertain the hope that he should be able to effect what his heart so much desired.

Isabella appeared at the tea-table. The old man informed her of the time set apart for the trial, and also of the fact that he was selected as one of the judges. Although he purposely avoided encouraging expectations that could not be realized, yet Isabella caught at this fact and flattered herself that Don Ferdinand could and would interpose his influence to save her lover's life.

The poor girl had good reason to know that Minon's heart was base, but she did not know the extent of his meanness. She did not know the resistless force of jealousy in the heart of a fierce and corrupt man, or she would have seen the odds were fearfully against the Guide. Hope is a flatterer, and she listened to its blandishments.

The time that intervened between his imprisonment and his trial passed heavily enough to Fanchette. A filthy looking brute, who served in the capacity of a jailer, visited him once or twice with a supply of the most loathsome provisions, but no bed was prepared for him to lie upon, in fact, not even a chair was furnished him to sit upon. When the morning of his trial came, he was pale and weak from weariness and suffering.

He had not been warned of his approaching examination. He therefore heard the door of his cell grate upon its hinges, without experiencing any emotion of an unusual kind.

His jailer threw the door wide open and then he saw that the corridor was filled with armed men.

"Come!" said the officer.

"What do you want of me?"

"I want to take you away."

"Where to?"

"To the court, to be sure."

"Am I to be tried to-day?"

"Yes, and executed, perhaps."

The youth had so long contemplated death that this had no terror for him, and he followed his jailer into the corridor. Here he was at once surrounded and his arms securely pinioned.

The youth smiled contemptuously, but made no remarks upon this proceeding. When he was secured the jailer placed himself at the head of the file of men, and said:

"March."

And the whole squad moved onward.

At the door of the prison and in the plaza an immense crowd had assembled. The ignorant rabble were completely under their masters, and their ears had been poisoned with reports of the brutality of the prisoner and his countrymen. Three of their friends had also fallen by his hand, and that alone was enough to secure his condemnation in their estimation.

A fearful shout rent the air as Fanchette appeared in the door.

"Death to the barbarian!"

"Murder the robber of the north!"

"Burn him at the stake!"

These and similar expressions stunned his ears, but they could not awe his stout heart.

He was conducted to a large room near the quarters of Captain Minon, and here he found assembled the men who were to decide upon his fate. The court, if it deserved the name, consisted of Minon, four of the subordinate officers of his troop and Don Ferdinand Xera. The old man sat apart from his comrades and seemed to be deeply absorbed in melancholy reflections.

Immediately after his appearance the court was organized, and the trial commenced. The renegade, Adincoart, repeated the story that he had first told concerning the character of the Guide, and then several of the lancers recounted his resistance at the time he was taken and the death of two of the three soldiers that had been fired upon by him. Then the prisoner was taken to another apartment, the court room cleared of spectators and a deliberation upon his deserts commenced.

The fate of the young man had been previously determined. Don Ferdinand Xera strove earnestly to avoid his condemnation as a spy, and urged that he should be retained as a prisoner of war until such time as the two Governments could come to an understanding about the matter of prisoners. He also urged the objection that had been suggested by the Donna Isabella, in regard to the non-existence of a declaration of hostilities from either side, but all was of no avail.

The position in which he was detected with the Donna Isabella had sealed his doom. Minon, whose influence with his officers was controlling, regarded him only in the light of a rival who stood between himself and happiness. He knew that Isabella loved him, and he knew that the passion was returned by the young stranger, and this was enough. Quenched hopes, piqued vanity and maddening jealousy were all asking for revenge, and it was determined that on the following morning the Guide should be shot in the Plaza!

"I warn you, gentlemen, that the consequences of this act will recoil upon yourselves. You had better defer the execution of your sentence. The prisoner is secure, and nothing is hazarded by delay."

"The public good demands an example," replied Minon. "In times like these, BRAVE men should not hesitate."

The court reiterated that he must die.

Don Ferdinand returned to his home with a heavy heart, after he had seen the Guide conveyed to his prison, amid the increased shouts and bravos of the crowd, who were highly delighted at the prospect of the spectacle that the morrow should afford them.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AROUSED—THE PRISON AT MIDNIGHT—THE JAILER IN FEAR—THE STEED OF THE WIND.

No sooner had Don Ferdinand reached his home, after the conclusion of the trial, and seated himself in his room, then he was visited by the Donna Isabella. This was exactly what he had dreaded, for he feared the effect of his sad intelligence.

He did not know the spirit of his niece!

"Have the court decided the matter?" she asked, in a tone that betrayed the most intense interest.

"They have."

"What is the result?" she asked, and her cheek grew pale as she awaited the old man's reply.

"He is condemned to be shot, in the plaza, to-morrow morning!" replied the old man solemnly.

Isabella drew herself up to her full height. Her eye flashed, and her breast heaved. The old man thought he had never seen her look so enchantingly beautiful. Her voice faltered no more, but a high and holy determination could be divined in her tone. Gazing into the eyes of the old man, she asked:

"Can nothing be done to avert this fate?"

"Nothing! All that I could do, has been done already. I have reasoned, persuaded, and threatened; but it was of no avail. Minon has determined that he must die!"

"Is the will of Minon superior to that of

Don Ferdinand Xera, in San Juan?" asked she, proudly. The old man was aroused by this pointed interrogatory. He did not usually admit of a superior in his neighborhood. He replied:

"This is a military, and consequently a state matter, Isabella, and I am powerless in regard to it. Minon, by the authority of the Government, is the military commander of this department, and no one has a right to question his power. Were it not for this, I would interfere in this matter, and even if I did not set the young man free, I would respite him from the death sentence."

"I believe you, dear uncle, I believe you would!" cried the Donna Isabella, embracing the old man, "but listen to me." And she stepped back a few paces from his chair, and again drew herself up proudly. "This young American shall not die! The base and perfidious Minon may overpower you, may circumvent you, but me, ME!" she repeated with fearful energy, "he SHALL NOT CIRCUMVENT! This night my preserver shall be liberated, or Minon's corpse shall feel the buzzards in the valley!"

"Holy Mother! are you mad?"

"No! dear uncle, I am not mad." And she paced the apartment with a firm tread, a flushed cheek, and a curling lip. "I am not mad! but, woman though I be, I will not permit this foul murder to be perpetrated. I will not be upbraided by the accursed thought that I did not endeavor to prevent it."

"But how CAN you prevent it?" asked the old man. "How can you restrain Minon, who has the will and the disposition? Can you not see that you are talking idly?"

"Ask me not! ask me not!" repeated Isabella vehemently. "I will defeat it, however. All I ask is that you will not interfere with my arrangements." And she turned and left the room, and sought her own apartment. The old man mused a moment after her departure, and then muttered:

"She has a great soul, by my faith. But then—pshaw! the girl is beside herself. Her ardent desires lead her to imagine all things as easy of accomplishment. I shall not interfere, for in fact there will be no necessity for it."

After all, love, aroused is no despicable antagonist. But the old man had yet to learn this fact.

When Isabella reached her own room she summoned her servant. As if there was something unusual in her mistress's manner, the woman obeyed with alacrity.

"Tell the men to saddle my horse, and let two of them be prepared to attend me." The woman appeared to be startled at the order and she hesitated a moment.

"Do you hear me?" cried Isabella impatiently. "Why do you not obey me?"

"I will, senora," and the woman departed muttering to herself: "My mistress is surely possessed! Surely one would suppose that she had adventured enough for a girl of nineteen. This young barbarian has turned her head."

She performed her mission, and the horses were saddled, and the attendants announced themselves ready. Isabella appeared in the yard immediately, equipped for a ride. She mounted her horse and rode out of the yard.

"Which way do we go, senora?"

"Follow me!" she replied imperiously, and she dashed across the valley, in the direction of the mountains.

"We are going among those cursed Indians again, I'll wager my head," said one attendant. "I should think that Don Ferdinand would restrain the conduct of a mad young woman in love with a robber."

"No matter where she goes," replied the other, "we must follow, though it lead us to purgatory."

And they galloped on behind the excited girl without exchanging another word. The valley was soon crossed, and then came the steep and dangerous path that led up the mountain. Speed was out of the question here, and they reined in their horses and proceeded slowly, and with caution. Notwithstanding the danger of the way, Isabella continued to lead the party, only noticing her attendants' ejaculations of fear by a contemptuous curl of her rich, red lip. An hour of this tedious travel brought them to the summit of the hill.

A ride of a few miles through the forest brought them to an encampment as famous for its romantic and silvan beauty as the far-famed haunt of Robin Hood.

This encampment consisted of some fifty or sixty rude huts, framed with the poles of the forest and covered with bark. Rude lances of strong, hard wood, bows and arrows, and a few other implements of primitive warfare were displayed in front of these tenements, and upon a small prairie, covered with a rich growth of luxuriant grass, and within a short distance of the huts, stood some four-score steeds of the most perfect form and movement. They were secured to stakes by long leather thongs, and three or four half-grown youths lay in the thick grass near them, apparently as a guard.

The encampment itself seemed to be temporarily deserted. The fires in front of the huts were smoldering lazily, and not a human being could be seen. Isabella brought her charger to a halt just outside the settlement, and motioned her attendants to her side.

"Assist me to dismount," said she, and one of her attendants proffered his support. "Now await my arrival," she said, and she walked into the midst of the camp.

One of the lads in attendance upon the horses observed her movement and he followed her. When she observed him she awaited his near approach, and asked him for the chief of the tribe in whose encampment she was. The boy appeared to recognize her, and a smile played about his lips as he answered:

"The chief is not far off. The men are pursuing the chase. Would Donna Isabella speak with the chief?"

"Yes, I wish much to see him. I have ridden far on purpose."

"Then I will call him!" and with the speed of a deer the boy darted from the encampment and disappeared in the woods.

Isabella was not long in waiting for the chief. He made his appearance, followed by the boy, and he, too, recognized her with a smile.

"Welcome to my home once more," he said, approaching her with a gesture of respect. "I am informed that you wish to see me."

"And so I do, Guevilla, for I am in want of your assistance. You once told me when that time come to visit you."

"I shall never forget that you saved my life," replied the chief. "You can command me."

"I knew you would redeem your promise," replied the maiden, with a smile, "and, therefore, have come to you. You must assist me in an enterprise to-night."

"Name it."

"In our village, in the prison adjoining the cathedral, is a youth condemned to death. I would liberate him."

"Is the guard a strong one?"

"Only a solitary soldier, besides the jailer."

"Then it is not a matter of difficulty."

"I suppose it will not be, yet it would be well to be prepared for some resistance. Minon longs for his life, and, as the time for the execution is to-morrow morning, he may for this night strengthen the guard. At all events, the prisoner MUST be saved, if the slaughter of all the Lancers is the consequence!"

The dark eye of the maiden flashed as she uttered these words in a firm and concentrated voice. The chief gazed upon her in undisguised admiration, and his swarthy features relaxed into a smile.

"The prisoner must be dear to you?"

"He is dear to me!" replied the maiden, unabashed. "And, although he is a stranger, I love him."

"Then he shall be rescued."

"Spoken like a generous man," replied the Donna Isabella. "Come prepared with a fleet steed, one of those for which your tribe are celebrated, for he must be conveyed beyond the reach of Minon's Lancers, far on his way to his friends."

"Everything shall be prepared. Meet me to-night near the village, and I will make the attempt."

"Do you remember a little grove, Guevilla, between the Rancho of my uncle and the village, upon the very bank of the river?" asked the Donna.

"I do. It is the one that concealed the villains that carried you off on the evening of the fete."

"The same. Meet me there."

"I will."

"Wait until repose has closed the eyelids of the villagers, and most of all, of Minon's Lancers. Then I will be there."

"I shall meet you."

With a light heart, and a firmer determination to compass the design in view, Isabella returned to her waiting domestics. They were half dead with fear, for, above all other objects, they dreaded the Indians; but the maiden heeded not their pale faces and anxious eyes, and bade them assist her to her horse.

When she sat firmly in the saddle, she turned and pursued her way to the old Rancho. Her uncle was wondering at her long absence when she returned, but he questioned her not, and she retired to her own room to seek a short repose.

She partook of some refreshments and threw herself upon her bed. Sleep, however, was out of the question. Her mind was too deeply excited, and her imagination too busy with the scenes of the coming night. She, therefore, left her couch, and seated herself by the window, to watch the slow decline of the sun.

How tedious was the time! How provokingly long the hours seemed. Sundown would never come, she thought, and it seemed as if she would die of impatience. In the midst of her anxiety and suspense, she heard the clatter of a horse's feet, and presently she espied Captain Minon, riding at full speed toward the Rancho.

"May the curse of the virgin alight upon him!" she ejaculated, before she could restrain the impious wish. "What can the murderer desire of us?"

The captain passed by the window, and alighted in the yard. He walked to the room of Don Ferdinand, found him there, and seated himself. The old man received him coldly.

"I have come," said the captain, proceeding at once to his business, "to see the Donna Isabella. I have something of importance to communicate to her."

Minon then sought the apartments of the servants. He desired to be conducted to their mistress, and his request was at once complied with. He entered the room.

"Wretch!" exclaimed Isabella, the moment she saw him, "how dare you pollute this room with your presence?"

The captain was astonished. He was not prepared for this indignant reception. He turned red—looked confused, and stammered:

"Excuse me, senora, but important business causes my intrusion. I think if you hear my mission you will rejoice that I have visited you!"

"It must be your part, then, to show me that you have forgotten your meanness, and have, even at this late hour, determined to act like a man and a Christian."

"You are very severe!"

"Severe, indeed! Is the truth severe? Say, man of blood! can the truth affect you?"

Minon quailed before the fierce, impassioned gaze of the lion-hearted girl that confronted him. A frown of forbidding darkness clouded her usually fair brow, and the fires of an indignant soul flashed from her eye. Her hot, rich blood suffused her cheek, and her figure trembled with suppressed rage, as she pointed at him.

Abashed and shrinking, he stood before her. His eyes fell to the floor, and upon every lineament of his gross and sensual countenance was stamped SHAME!

"Have you repented your conduct toward the youthful stranger?" continued Isabella. "Have you determined to resist the inclinations of your brutal disposition, and restore him to life and liberty? If you have, speak, for then I will gladly listen!"

Minon felt that he would rather have faced a regiment of the hostile barbarians. At last he replied:

"It is about the prisoner I wish to speak, if you will only listen to me. I came upon that errand."

"What of him?" said Isabella.

"You have heard, of course, that the court has condemned him to die in the morning?"

"Well, suppose I have?"

"You can preserve his life."

"How?"

Minon hesitated. He had just seen a specimen of the girl's indignant powers, and he dared not name the terms that he thought to propose. Isabella observed his hesitation, and said:

"Why do you hesitate, sir? Name the terms upon which I can save the young man's life. You need not fear for the magnitude of the sum. I am not penniless!"

"I did not allude to money or wealth of any

kind," said Minon, deeply mortified that the girl should so understand him. "I do not deal in life, for gold!"

"Name your conditions, then."

"If," and the captain turned away his face, to avoid the eye of the maiden, "if you will consent to renounce him, and promise me your hand, he shall be pardoned, and conducted in safety to the Rio Grande!"

It is impossible to picture the look of superlative scorn with which the girl regarded the officer. Once, but only for a moment, as brief as the lightning's flash, the idea occurred to her of meeting Minon's meanness with treachery; but her better nature predominated, and she rejected it. Almost unable to articulate, she replied:

"If any act or thought of yours could increase the contempt and dislike I entertain for your character, you have now brought it forth. I did not conceive it possible for the soul of the meanest wretch that God permits to crawl, to entertain an idea so revolting: an attempt to purchase a wife with the blood of an innocent being. Go, sir, your presence is a curse, more to be dreaded than the breath of the putrid pestilence. Both yourself and your offer meet from me with the scorn they deserve."

The last trump had been played, and still the game was lost. Shame and desire both fled from the captain's breast, and in their stead came rage.

"Then, by the Holy Cross!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth and clinching his fists, "the boy dies. Ay, I solemnly swear that to-morrow is the last day he lives!"

"Will you leave me, or must I call for assistance? I tell you I would rather associate with one of the damned spirits!"

"Remember that he dies," said Minon, leaving the apartment with a furious gesture. "And you may have the satisfaction of reflecting that his blood is upon your hands."

"The odious wretch!" cried Isabella, after he had departed, and she threw herself upon a chair and burst into tears. How long she wept she knew not. When she aroused from her grief the sun was low in the West, and she felt a sort of pleasure at the flight time had taken. She was about searching the mansion for some articles that she deemed indispensable for her night's adventure. She found them, and again she retired to her window. All days will end, no matter what the grief or the cares that afflict us, and night came upon the valley of San Juan, to the great relief of the impatient girl. She prepared all things for her expected meeting with the chief, and then waited the hour at which the servants usually retired.

When the house was still, the maiden equipped herself in a suit of male attire, that exactly suited her person. The dark, glossy locks were secured under a close velvet cap, and her delicate hands were covered with stout gloves. Then she thrust into the bosom of her vest a long, keen dirk, placed a small pair of pistols in her pocket, and with a step as noiseless as could be, she left the Rancho, and gained the green fields beyond, without being detected. She then drew a long breath, and congratulated herself upon her extraordinary good fortune.

She quickly traversed the path that led to the little grove. She threw herself upon one of the rude seats, and, with a heart filled with tumultuous feeling—sometimes fearful and doubting, and sometimes bright with hope and anticipation,—she awaited the arrival of the Chieftain, who had promised to meet her.

Heavily and solemnly, the bell of the distant Cathedral tolled the passing hours. Midnight was finally struck, and the maiden arose from her hard couch, with an expression of impatience upon her face.

"Will he disappoint me?" she asked, in a half whisper.

A deep and solemn voice at her side answered:

"He is here!"

The maiden started, like a frightened fawn; but a glance showed her that Guevilla was beside her.

"True to your word!" she exclaimed, seizing his huge hand, in the excess of her satisfaction: "but where are your followers? You surely have not come alone!"

"They are near the prison. But come, we have no time to lose. The village was all still, ere I left it."

"Are there any extra sentinels?"

"None."

"So far we are favored."

Then they left the grove, and swiftly pursued the path that led toward the village.

They gained a position in front of the plaza, unheard by the solitary sentinel, who was pacing his round, occasionally halting long enough to vociferate in a stentorian voice:

"SENTINELA ALERTA!"

"Now," whispered Guevilla, "you have nothing to do, but observe. All our plans are arranged. This sentinel must first be secured. If he attempts to make alarm, a poniard will enter his heart. If he does not resist, he is safe."

Then the chief uttered a low sound, something like the mournful note of a night bird. Suddenly, the shadows of his men darkened the green sward, near the sentinel's path, and then the men themselves came into view, and seized the sentinel by the arms. At the same time, the blade of a poniard glittered in the moonbeams, and a determined voice exclaimed: "Utter the least alarm, and you are dead. At regular intervals you must continue your cry; but anything different from that, and you die! If you are discreet, your life will be spared!"

The terrified sentinel promised the strictest compliance, gave up his mulet, and as an earnest of his intentions, shouted:

"SENTINELA ALERTA!"

The chief and the maiden then emerged from their cover. The former approached his confederate, and asked:

"Has any one gone for the jailer?"

"Ay! he will be here in a few moments."

"All right!"

Scarcely were the words uttered, when two more of the Indians entered the plaza, having between them the shrinking and trembling form of Minon's turnkey.

"Did he make any alarm?"

"None."

"It is well. Now, sir, conduct us at once to the cell of the young man, condemned to die."

"Go on, seniors! go on. Lead me to the prison steps. You shall be admitted; only, for God's sake, spare my life."

"No more whining, but lead on, we have no time to lose," and the Chieftain, and the jailer stood before the door of the prison. The bolts were shoved, and they entered the long corridor.

The jailer halted before the door of the Guide's cell. He selected one from a bunch of keys, and placing it in the lock, he turned it and said: "He is in there! enter."

With the quickness of thought, Isabella sprung against the door, and in a moment was in her lover's arms.

"Holy Virgin be praised! he is safe!" she cried.

"This is no time for words," said the Chieftain. "Follow me. Ere the daylight, we must be many miles away."

"I am bound," said the Guide, "and cannot go."

As quick as the lightning, Isabella drew her dirk, and with its keen edge, cut the hateful bonds. The Guide clasped her with transport to his heart.

"Where are the horses?" asked Isabella, as they emerged into the plaza.

"Close at hand," replied the chief. "Follow."

He led them to the margin of the river, behind the Cathedral. Here stood the horses for the party, in charge of a lad. The men had followed with the sentinel and jailer, for whom horses were also provided; and all but Isabella were mounted in a few moments.

"Do we part?" asked the Guide.

"For a short time," said Isabella, the pang that she experienced at the separation being quieted by the thought that it was essential to her lover's safety. "Fear not for me, we shall meet again."

"Farewell, then; but rest assured that we shall again behold each other, where sorrow and death do not interrupt us."

The horses were pawing the earth, and snuffing the balmy breeze, impatient for a start.

"Is he well mounted for the chase, if one should be given?" asked Isabella, turning to the Chieftain.

"He has the best horse in the tribe. My followers have well named him the steed of the wind. The fawn upon the hill-side has not a lighter tread, or fleetest limb!"

"Then away."

One wave of the hand. Off dashed the impatient animals. Isabella watched them with

a throbbing heart, as they sped across the valley. By and by they entered the dark shadow of the mountain, and she could see them no more. She dashed a big tear from her straining eye, and turned, with a lingering tread toward her home.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COVERT—PALO ALTO—RESACA DE LA PALMA—THE CAMP AT MATAMORAS.

UP the rugged mountain toiled the steeds of the chief's party. When the summit was gained, they struck into a broad and open path, and at a rattling pace they pursued it for several miles. Then they came to a thick and tangled forest, and their progress became slow and tedious. They reached a small fountain, that seemed to bubble from the solid rock; and here, after refreshing the panting animals, the party separated. The chief and the Guide remained together, while the remainder, with the sentinel and jailer, pursued the road to the Indian encampment.

"Which way does our path lay?" asked the Guide, as the larger party were lost in the distance.

"Nearly a league from this spot, our journey ends for the present. At a future time, after the excitement of your escape has subsided, I will conduct you further."

They then started, following a direction different from that of their comrades. At every step they proceeded, the way seemed to become more impassable, and the obstacles to increase in size and frequency. The Guide was lost in wonder, at the sagacity and patience evinced by the highly trained steeds they rode.

In a dense thicket, the darkness of which was almost impenetrable, the Chief halted.

"Here we will dismount," said he, "and here we shall find your home for a short period. I have endeavored to make it as comfortable as possible; but, no doubt, you will miss many of the conveniences to which you have been accustomed."

"You greatly mistake me, my excellent friend. I am none of your parlor-haunters. For a long time, I have been accustomed to the rough fare of the forest and the prairie."

"Then you will do well enough," said the Chieftain, as he secured the steeds to a young tree.

After the horses were cared for, he took the Guide by the hand, saying: "Let me lead you, else in the darkness you will miss your way. It will be a sharper eye than Captain Minon's that discovers your abode."

A few feet from the place at which they halted, they came in contact with a huge rock, that threw itself boldly out from the mountain. The face of it was covered with a dense growth of wild vine, and creeping tendrils. These the Chief thrust aside, and as they moved on a few paces, the Guide conjectured that they were in the mouth of a cave. The Chief suddenly let go his hand, and said: "Wait for a moment, and we will have a light."

The light glare of a torch soon flooded the apartment, for the Guide was right in his conjecture, and after his eyes became accustomed to the rays, he discovered that it was a very comfortable place. It contained a bed, rude, to be sure, but cleanly, an abundant supply of provisions, and close to the entrance, a little spring of the purest water, made its appearance through a crevice of the rock. It was, in fact, a snug retreat.

"Here, I must leave you," said the Chief, planting the torch. "Minon will not fail to visit me. To-morrow, and, perhaps, not until the day after, I will visit you."

Before the Guide had time to reply, the Chieftain had left the cavern. At length, drowsiness put fear to flight, and he enjoyed a sleep as refreshing as it was unusual. He arose in the morning, much refreshed.

The Chieftain did not visit him that day, but early the next morning he made his appearance. As he had anticipated, Minon was scouring the country in every direction, in search of the fugitive, and his missing jailer and sentinel, and had visited the encampment of the Chief. The Guide was informed, that, in consequence of the eagerness of the pursuit, it would not be safe to leave his present retreat for several days.

The "several days" swell into weeks. During all the time, Fanchette remained in the cavern, mostly alone, and he became depressed and dispirited. How long and wearisome the time seemed, now that he was deprived of the company of the Donna Isabella.

How he longed to clasp her in his arms, and testify the gratitude he felt for his deliverance from impending death. How he longed to repeat the tale of his love, and again pledge her the enduring affection of a heart that cherished her image as its empress.

As often as he saw the Chief he asked for her. All his enquiries were vain, for the Chief had not seen her. He dared not venture to San Juan, for, although Minon had expressed his opinion that the prisoner had escaped by other means than the assistance of the Indians, their leader knew the treachery of his soul too well to trust himself within the reach of his power. Consequently, the Guide was without tidings of his loved one, and almost despaired of ever seeing her again.

Yet the thought haunted him that there was something prophetic in her farewell words: "We SHALL meet again!"

It was evident that she had some determination in view, and she did not, by any means, consider the parting as final. From these words, and this thought, the ardent young man gleaned a little comfort. One morning, the Chief came to his cave, with a bright smile upon his features. The Guide felt sure that he should receive some tidings of his mistress, and he asked:

"What news Guevilla? You appear to be the bearer of pleasant tidings."

"I trust I am."

"Let us hear them, then, for I can assure you that I am much in need of them. This confinement is irksome."

"To-morrow I shall conduct you to the Rio Grande. You can then bid adieu to inactivity."

"Indeed!" cried the Guide, yet he did not experience joy at the announcement. Isabella would be left behind, and without her the world would be a wilderness.

"We shall start betimes," said the chief. "I will conduct you within an easy stage of one of the American posts."

"But am I to quit this region without seeing the Donna Isabella?" asked the Guide.

"I cannot say," replied the chief. "That maiden is undoubtedly watched, and will find it difficult, if not impossible, to meet you. However, when this war passes over, you can again visit San Juan in safety. Then you can meet her without fear."

The morning of departure came, and with it the chieftain, with the horses that were to serve them on the journey, but he brought no tidings of the Donna Isabella. He mounted his horse, turned his eyes toward San Juan, and with an emotion that threatened to produce tears, rode out of the thicket.

On the evening of the third day from their departure, they dismounted upon the banks of the Rio Grande.

While the steeds were cropping the rich grass that grew about them the Guide and the Chieftain sat beneath a tree, and partook of the refreshments with which they were provided. After the repast was ended, the Indian turned to his comrade, and said:

"Here you and me must part. Across this stream the country is in possession of your friends, and further than this, I cannot venture in safety."

"If, in the war that threatens, misfortune should place you in the power of our troops, do not forget to ask for me. In that case I may be enabled to repay your kindness."

The Chief mounted his horse, leaving the horse that the Guide had ridden, secured by a thong. The Guide asked: "The other steed Guevilla! Do you not take him with you?"

"The Steed of the Wind is yours. He will never fail you!" and he loosened his reins and was soon lost to sight. The Guide detached his splendid gift, mounted him, and crossed the stream, to the opposite shore. The noble animal breasted the swift running current, and brought him in safety to the opposite bank. Here the Guide halted to determine on his course. He finally determined to encamp for the night where he then was, and on the morning, follow in the direction in which he knew Fort Brown must be by the course of the river.

Early in the morning he resumed his way. After riding about an hour he came upon a

broad, fresh trail, and after examining it minutely, he decided that a large body of troops had lately passed over the ground. Then came his perplexity. Were they friends, or were they enemies?

While he was endeavoring to answer this question, in a way to satisfy his mind, the distant booming of a cannon smote upon his ear. He started from his reverie, and his eye lighted up with an unusual brilliancy. Again he heard the sound, and he exclaimed: "Surely that tells of battle and of strife! From whence can the noise proceed? I am not near enough to Fort Brown to hear its artillery." He rode toward the noise. As he progressed, the evidences of the strife increased. "On!" shouted the Guide, not knowing whither his headlong course would carry him. He at length came to an opening in the forest, and a scene of terrible grandeur opened to him.

Beyond him lay a rich and level prairie, one side skirted by a dark chaparral, and the other fringed by a stream of shallow water. For a mile and a half across the prairie, stretched a line of troops, their bright weapons, and the trappings of their uniforms flashing like diamonds in the rays of the sun, which streamed upon them through the cloud of smoke that hung over them. The left of the army, composed of a splendid body of Mexican lancers, somewhat in advance of their friends, rested upon the chaparral, while solid masses of infantry and artillery, stretched away to the stream upon the right. At occasional intervals along the line, batteries of cannon were belching forth clouds of fire and ball, shaking the firm earth, with their deep-toned roar.

The first shock of the contact had passed—the first blood had been shed in the Mexican War.

"There is the Mexican army," said the Guide, peering through the cloud of smoke that was every moment becoming more dense and impenetrable, "but where are my friends? Ah! yonder they are, just in the skirt of the prairie!" and he arose in his stirrup and leaned forward to obtain a better view.

"There they are," he cried, as a column moved out into the plain. "There they are! There's Twiggs, with the infantry, for I can see their banners. There's the Third, Fourth, and Fifth. How came they here? Can they have been driven from Fort Brown?"

He settled back into his saddle, but had scarcely gained his seat, when a dark cloud of horsemen could be seen on the right of the infantry.

"There go my friends!" he cried, throwing himself from his horse. "There is Ringgold's artillery."

And just at that moment a thundering of cannon echoed far and wide through the woods, and the mounted men appeared sheeted in smoke and flame!

Unable any longer to restrain the fierce enthusiasm that filled his bosom, the Guide waved his cap and shouted:

"HUZZAH FOR THE FLAG OF THE FREE!"

"There is more of them yonder," cried the Guide, leaving his horse and advancing toward the prairie. "There's Duncan's men, and the Eighth infantry. Fort Brown is surely evacuated!"

With the most intense anxiety pervading his heart, the Guide surveyed the contest.

Between the smoke-grimed lines of combatants a livid flame appeared. It was small at first, and confined to a limited circle, and attracted but a little attention. By and by it increased in volume, and at length, like a frightened steed, it ran hither and thither, and eventually enveloped the whole prairie.

It surged out into immense waves, red, fierce and destroying, and seemed to embrace the warriors of both sides in its horrid folds! The thunder of the cannon died away—the armies became hushed and still—and surveyed the progress of the consuming elements!

"The prairie is on fire!" said the Guide, "and may God help the fallen and the dying!"

Shooting into tall spires and fantastic wreaths—bellowing and moaning like a herd of frightened buffaloes—the flames approached the forest, in the edge of which the American troops were stationed.

"God defend them!" cried the Guide. "A foe more to be dreaded than the haughty Mexicans is upon them!"

With an interest actually painful from its intensity, the Guide watched the progress of the fire. At length the clear tones of a warrior's

voice rung out high above the sullen roar of the flames. It caused every fiber of the Guide's frame to thrill:

"CHARGE!"

In a moment the center of the fierce, red lake was filled with the forms of dark horsemen. They dashed into the raging fire and disappeared from view.

Roar after roar, and cheer after cheer, announced that Duncan had gained the enemy's flank and was pouring in upon them a most murderous fire. The dry prairie grass was soon consumed and the fire abated, and then the Guide saw that Duncan had broken up the Mexican lines, and their Lancers and their infantry were in full retreat through the chaparral.

"The day is ours!" he cried, wild with delight. "Huzzah for the Flag of the Free!" He did not shout alone. The whole line of American troops joined him, and the deafening yell arose far up toward the tranquil heavens.

The noise of the battle died away gradually. Parties were scouring the smoking field, bringing in the wounded, and hastily burying the dead. The victorious troops did not pursue the retreating enemy, but encamped upon the bloody field, upon which they had gathered their first laurels.

Throwing the bridle across his arms, the Guide moved to the spot upon which his friends were preparing their encampment. He was immediately recognized and received with a cordial welcome, for both the officers and his more immediate companions had given him up for lost. He had been but a few moments in the camp before his hand was grasped by Field, who exclaimed:

"The Prairie Guide, upon my honor! I am astonished to meet you, and HERE, too!"

"I am sure this is the proper place for a soldier," replied the Guide, "and I regret that I did not arrive in time to have a part assigned me in the battle."

"Why, man! we have mourned for you as dead. The little request with which you charged me on leaving I have complied with, and informed your friends that you were probably no more!"

"You were somewhat hasty, it appears."

"I will inform the general of your arrival, and he will be impatient to see you. Now I must go to Ringgold. Poor fellow!"

The Guide made his way to the tent occupied by the captain. That officer had just returned from a council of war, and was awaiting him. The moment he discovered him, he said:

"Come, let us go to the general's quarters. Old Rough and Ready is awaiting you. Nothing could have added to his surprise and delight when I told him you had returned."

He went to the tent of the commander. Thorp was there, and several other officers all anxious for a history of the Guide's adventures. Taylor took him warmly by the hand, and by his smile and the cordiality of his welcome, confirmed the previous report of Field.

"Now, my brave fellow," said he, after the ceremonies of the meeting were dispensed with, "tell us all about the road to Monterey. You perceive by to-day's work that the game has opened."

The night had waned into the morning before the audience broke up. The Guide accompanied the captain to his tent. He fell asleep thinking of the Donna Isabella and the noble daring she had displayed in relieving him from peril.

Daylight found the American army paraded and under arms. Apart from the columns was Taylor and the officers of his little staff. Anxiety could be plainly traced upon their countenances, and it was apparent that they were holding a council of war. The question was one of deep importance, although of itself it was very simple. It was merely should they advance or retreat upon Point Isabel.

Taylor at length decided the debate. He pledged himself to sleep at the encampment opposite Matamoras that night, or perish in the attempt to reach it. They started onward, following in the trail of the retreating Mexicans.

It was obvious to all the officers that the Mexicans would make another stand so soon as they could select a position that they deemed favorable. For this reason a strong party of scouts were sent in advance of the main body by General Taylor, and the command of them was conferred upon Fanchette. A brisk march of an hour disclosed to them that the Mexicans had received a rein-

forcement, and were advantageously posted a short distance in advance, and were again determined to try the fortunes of a fight. Word was immediately passed to the rear, and once more the veterans comprising the little army prepared themselves for the stern encounter.

A place more strongly fortified by nature, and adapted to a military position, could not be found than that the Mexicans had selected. Upon one flank was a large pond, and upon the other a formidable chaparral. Immediately in front of them was a dark and rugged ravine, through which, huddled together, and entirely at the mercy of the enemy, the Americans would be obliged to pass in order to reach the river. Here, in order of battle, they were drawn up for the fray.

A few moments of awful suspense and the drama opened. Under cover of the slaughtering fire of the artillery, in front of the ravine, one column pushed into the chaparral, and another skirted the pond on the enemy's left.

These daring maneuvers, executed with a promptness and skill that was wonderful, enabled the whole American force to engage. As soon as they gained their respective positions, they opened a galling and destructive fire, but the enemy bravely withstood it, and returned it with precision and effect.

The Guide was foremost in the hot and obstinate encounter that now raged. Himself and his little command of pioneers were in the extreme advance of the column stationed in the chaparral, and the balls were flying around them, crushing and rending the branches above them, and plowing up the earth around them.

Each party obstinately maintained their ground. The slaughter was great, and every moment seemed to increase the sanguinary nature of the fight. The American general saw that a more desperate attack must be carried into effect, or his little band, scarcely a handful when compared with the hosts of his adversaries, would soon melt away. Calling upon his dragoons, he pointed to a destructive battery in the center of the enemy's line, and ordered them to charge it.

The artillery fell back to clear the ravine for the operations of their daring comrades. The little band received their desperate orders, and following the flashing blade in the leader's hand, they thundered through the echoing gorge, full upon the cannon of their foe. A tremendous discharge overtook them in the midst of their wild career, thinning their ranks.

Desperate indeed was the fight that now raged, in the very midst of the enemy! The keen blades of the dragoons dealt out death at every stroke, yet as fast as the warriors fell before them, new ones would present themselves for death. The general saw the fearful struggle and resolved to sustain his dying soldiers.

The infantry men pushed on in the wake of the dragoons. One dense, dark column of frowning men and glittering bayonets, with steadiness and firmness that no force could withstand, rushed against the enemy's lines. The fortune of the day was decided!

The Mexican center was shaken—then it wavered for a moment—then, with a yell of despair, the swarthy warriors turned, and with rapid footsteps fled from the gory field.

One wild, exulting cry of victory went up from the American column.

A few moments before the shout of victory, the Prairie Guide had been felled to the earth by a ball. A smile parted his lips, and he said faintly: "Rosaca de la Palma is ours! The victory is ours! Ah! Isabella—" A comrade was standing over him, listening to his words, but he heard no more! The voice had ceased, and a deathlike paleness overspread the Guide's features!

His companion left him in search of assistance. This was procured, and he was conveyed to the train, which was already in motion for Fort Brown. The wounded were collected, the dead interred, and the battle-field left to the wolf and the bird of prey.

Just before night, the American army, jaded and worn with a wearisome march and hard fighting, emerged from the forest, and came in sight of Fort Brown.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TRAGEDY—A MORNING CALL—A REBUFF—A FLIGHT—A WEDDING.

A sad heart had the Donna Isabella as she struck upon the path that led to the Rancho. She had parted with her lover, and a thousand

incidents might prevent their ever meeting again.

With those thoughts in her mind, she pursued her way home. She had gained the clear fields, a little way from the village, and was beginning to quicken her steps, when some one approached her, and a rough gripe on her shoulder caused her to shriek with the pain. A well-known voice exclaimed: "Which way, youngster, and whither have you been?" It was the renegade. The maiden turned toward him, at this rough salutation, and for a moment forgot that she was attired in male apparel. The moment the renegade saw her countenance he knew her, notwithstanding her disguise.

"Ah!" he cried, a hellish smile upon his features; "the Donna Isabella, upon my word! Some little intrigue, eh?"

"Let me go!" said Isabella, firmly. "Let my business be what it may, it is not with you!"

"Not so fast, pretty one! Not so fast."

"Will you release me?" asked the maiden, her eyes flashing. "Will you leave me?"

"Well, I think I will not just at present. At all events, before we part, I will once taste of your pouting lips. Upon my word, they look as if they were made for kissing." And the renegade stooped down to pollute the lips of the trembling girl with a kiss.

"Wretch!" she cried, springing from his grasp, and drawing the sharp dirk from her bosom, "beware; I am armed and can defend myself from such as you are."

The villain recoiled a step and exclaimed: "Well said! You seem to value your charms highly, yet now that I have made the attempt I will take the kiss, if you are armed with all the thunders of hell!"

And he strode toward the girl with his arms outstretched to grasp her. Quicker than thought the glittering dirk was sheathed in his bosom, and he fell to the earth with a moan.

The maiden was terrified. She ran toward the Rancho with all the speed she could command, but when she reached the little grove, she was compelled to halt for breath. After a few moments, she pursued her way, and succeeded in regaining her room without alarming any of the servants.

The first care was to secrete her disguise. This she readily accomplished, and then she arranged her room, so as to give it its usual appearance, and then retired to rest. She lay in painful thought, until after the day had dawned. Then she arose, but an unusual bustle in the courtyard caused her to seek the bed again.

Her heart assured her that Minon had arrived in search of the fugitive. The captain was below, backed by a score of his lancers. Don Ferdinand was aroused from his slumbers.

"Who wants me at this unsensational hour?" cried the old man, petulantly.

"Captain Minon and his lancers!"

"Curse Captain Minon and his lancers! Did he say what was the matter?"

"He did not, but as near as I could learn, the prisoner—the young American, has escaped."

"Holy Virgin be praised!" cried the old man. "Reach me my clothes there. Now you may go and tell Captain Minon that I shall be down in a very few moments."

The servant departed, and the old man hurried on his garments, and made his appearance in the court-yard.

"Good-morning, captain!" he exclaimed, with affected pleasantness, "what makes you and your brave soldiers so early upon duty?"

"Cause enough," growled Minon. "My jailer, my sentinel, and the prisoner are missing, and we have discovered the dead body of the young man who detected him. It was lying in the field near the path that leads to the Rancho."

"Well, by the Holy Cross!" exclaimed the old man, highly exasperated. "Do you mean to insinuate by this parade upon my premises, that I know anything of the matter?"

"Will you call the Donna Isabella, senor?"

The Donna Isabella was called. As soon as the old man espied her he said: "Come down here, Isabella. Here is Minon with a long story against you!"

The maiden descended to her uncle's side. She returned the glance of Minon with one of unequivocal scorn, and asked: "What charges does the captain prefer this time?"

Minon discovered that he could make no discoveries here.

"I would say to Don Ferdinand Xera that I have no hope of obtaining the information I seek, as he refuses me his assistance. At all events, the matter shall be fully laid before the Government."

"Yes," said Isabella, with a provoking smile. "Pray, do, captain. The ladies cannot go out unprotected, and as the soldiers of the land are transformed into their assailants, it is high time the Government interfered. Do send a commission, captain!"

Minon trembled with passion. He dared not trust himself to reply, but wheeling his horse, he left the yard followed by his troops. If ever a man possessed of such evil passions was to be pitied, that man was Minon. Within a week, the excitement consequent upon the events that had taken place, subsided.

A strange determination at length took possession of the maiden's mind. She resolved to follow her lover to the Rio Grande! She knew Guevilla would not refuse to accompany her there, and when once she should arrive, she would be in her lover's society, and whatever others might think of her conduct, or of the adventure—that to her would be the greater bliss. When once she had determined, nothing could shake her resolution. She provided herself with an ample sum of money, and also with a few weapons for the defense of her person. Her male attire was again called into requisition. A night was fixed for her departure, from the old Rancho. She wrote a note to Don Ferdinand stating her intentions, and pleading her powerful love in excuse. When the household was still, she left the room and gained the stables without making any alarm. Her own horse was brought forth, hastily equipped for the ride, and after she left the yard, she scoured across the valley with the speed of the wind, and once more took the path that led to the Indian encampment. She found it hushed in repose when she arrived, yet sentinels were upon duty, who warned the Chief of her coming. Guevilla shook off his slumbers, when informed of the name of his unexpected visitor, and he hastened to meet her.

"Ah! senora," he said, as he approached her, "is it you, and alone at this hour?"

"It is me, Guevilla," she replied, "and once more I have come to tax your generosity."

"What does the senora ask? Anything within the power of Guevilla shall not be denied her."

"I knew you would not desert me, brave man, and hence I have sought you alone and unattended, at this hour. I wish you to conduct me to the banks of the Rio Grande."

"THE RIO GRANDE, lady!" exclaimed the Chief, in surprise. "Surely you have heard that the war rages there with terrible fury, and that two bloody battles have been fought, in which our countrymen have been defeated. Has not the report reached San Juan?"

The maiden's cheek blanched at the announcement—not from fear. Perhaps she thought her lover had fallen. The emotion subsided in a moment, and she said: "Then, by all means, I must go, Guevilla, and you must accompany me. Make no delay, I pray you, but let us proceed at once. I will compensate you beyond your imagination."

"You shall be obeyed," replied the chief, as he turned to prepare himself for the journey. His horse, his weapons, and a bag of provisions always in readiness, were all the preparations he required, and in a short time he was mounted and at the maiden's side.

They reached the banks of the Rio Grande, a few miles below Matamoras, and here the Chief was dismissed, and the maiden was left alone. Her companion had pointed out to her the path to pursue, and she pushed on toward the point of her destination.

"When I reach Matamoras," she said, "I shall be with my countrymen, and will pass unnoticed. I can cross the river at any time, and enter the camp of the Americans. For the sake of my lover they will treat me well, and conduct me to him."

As she progressed her impatience increased, and she urged her horse to a gallop. In passing through a strip of woods, she fancied she heard a shout, and she reined in her animal and listened. She had not been mistaken, for, in addition to shouting, she heard the furious rattling of advancing horsemen, and, for the first time since her setting out, was terrified. Before she could resolve upon a retreat or an advance, the woods were filled with armed men, and she was surrounded. She knew, by

the strange dress and equipments of the men, that they must be American soldiers. One, who seemed to be the leader of the party, approached her, and, after surveying her attentively for a moment, he asked:

"To what point are you traveling, sir? We shall be obliged to ask you for your pass."

Not a word of this did the maiden understand. Her limbs trembled, and her heart beat violently. She replied by asking:

"Can you not speak in Spanish, señor?"

The officer smiled, shook his head, and called a soldier from the ranks.

"There," said he, "you converse with the lad, and see what you can make of him."

The soldier was conversant with the Spanish language, and he repeated the officer's question.

"I am going to the Mexican army at Matamoras," replied Isabella. "I have no pass!"

"To Matamoras?" said the soldier. "Do you not know that Matamoras is in the hands of the Americans?"

The party started for Matamoras, Isabella riding in the midst of the escort. She was atken at once to the tent of the General-in-Chief, where were Throp, Field, and several other officers.

"Captain," said the general, "I have made a discovery with regard to that prisoner, and I have also a suspicion in my mind I mean to test. Send some one to Fanchette, and tell him to appear before me at once. Be careful not to mention the presence of the prisoner."

The messenger had soon returned with Fanchette. They made their way into the room, where Isabella was standing beside her interpreter. She did not at first observe him, but the bustle at length attracted her attention, and she looked up and discovered him. One shriek of mingled joy and surprise, and she bounded to his arms, and buried her face in the folds of his garments.

"I am right!" exclaimed the general, turning to Field and his associates. "This is no other than the true-hearted maid, that since Fanchette's return, has been known among us as the 'ROSE OF THE RIO GRANDE!'"

With a delicacy that did infinite credit to the war-stained soldiers, they retired from the apartment, and left the Guide and his mistress alone. What they conversed about is not our province to tell. They were together for a long time, and when the Guide left the apartment, it was to ask the officers to return, and to send a comrade for a chaplain. The marriage ceremony was at once performed, and during that night and the following day, many were the toasts that were drank, and the cheers that were given for the PRAIRIE GUIDE and the ROSE OF THE RIO GRANDE.

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